THE 50 FOR 50 GROWTH GUIDES · GROWTH FACTOR 3

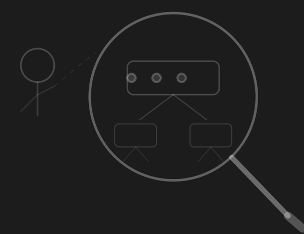
The Back of the House: Get Back in Your Business

THE 50 FACTOR — GROWTH FACTOR #03

Get Your Ass Back in Your Business

The Complete Implementation Guide

BY SCOTT SCULLY



Principle #3: Get Your Ass Back in Your Business

The Complete Implementation Guide

This white paper is a companion to Chapter 3 of The 50 Factor by Scott Scully. The book tells the story. This guide gives you the step-by-step playbook to reconnect with the reality of your own company — starting this week.

Why This Principle Matters

"Work on the business, not in the business."

You've heard it a hundred times. It's in every business book. Every podcast. Every LinkedIn post from someone who just got back from a mastermind. And for founders under $50 million in revenue, it is one of the most dangerous pieces of advice in modern business.

Here's what that advice actually produces: CEOs who run their companies from dashboards and leadership meetings. Who haven't taken a customer service call in six months. Who couldn't describe, in detail, what it feels like to be a new client going through their onboarding process. Who have training materials with last year's pricing. Who find out about problems from spreadsheets instead of from people.

They're "on" the business. They're completely disconnected from it.

The data is damning:

- • **Bain & Company:** 80% of CEOs believe their company delivers a superior customer experience. Only 8% of their customers agree.

- • **McKinsey:** Companies where senior leaders spend regular time in frontline operations have 25% higher employee engagement and 20% higher customer satisfaction scores.
- • **Gallup:** Only 22% of employees strongly agree that their leadership has a clear direction for the organization — and the primary driver of that perception is whether leaders are visibly present and connected.
- • In a survey of 500 B2B companies, founders who spent fewer than 4 hours per month in frontline operations were 3x more likely to report "stalled growth" than those who spent 4+ hours per week.

The gap between what a CEO thinks is happening and what is actually happening grows wider every month the CEO stays disconnected. And by the time the gap shows up on a dashboard — in churn rates, NPS drops, revenue stalls — it's been festering for 6–12 months.

The Deadly Myth: "On" vs. "In"

The "work on, not in" advice was originally aimed at solo operators who were trapped doing $15/hour tasks instead of $500/hour strategy. For a solopreneur or a five-person company, it's legitimate: stop doing the bookkeeping and go sell.

But somewhere along the way, the advice mutated. It became an excuse for founders to completely disengage from operations. To sit in corner offices reading reports about what their company is doing instead of seeing it with their own eyes. To confuse delegation with disconnection.

Here's the truth: "on the business" and "in the business" are not opposites. They are two modes that feed each other.

Strategy without ground truth is fantasy. You can build the most elegant growth plan in the world, but if you don't know that your sales team is fumbling the pricing question on every call, your plan is built on assumptions that don't match reality.

Ground truth without strategy is chaos. If all you do is firefight — jumping from crisis to crisis on the front lines — you never build the systems that prevent the crises from recurring.

You need both. And the founders who build the best companies cycle between the two constantly — spending time in the business to gather information, then going back to their desk to build systems based on what they learned.

Most founders are dangerously over-indexed on strategy. This white paper is about rebalancing.

The Weekly Habit: Four Hours Minimum

This is not a one-time exercise. It's not a "go spend a day on the floor and check the box." It is a permanent, weekly, non-negotiable habit that you install into your calendar and never remove.

The commitment: One half-day per week — a minimum of four hours — spent *in* the business. Not in meetings about the business. In it. Watching, listening, observing, taking notes.

The calendar block: Open your calendar right now. Create a recurring event, every week, for four hours. Title it: **IN THE BUSINESS — DO NOT BOOK.** Pick a day and time that you can protect. Wednesday afternoon works well for most founders — late enough in the week that you've handled the urgent Monday/Tuesday fires, early enough that you can act on what you learn by Friday.

The non-negotiable: This block does not get moved for client meetings. It does not get sacrificed for a board call. It does not get "made up next week." If someone tries to book over it, the answer is: "I'm not available." You don't need to explain. You don't need to justify. You are doing the most important thing a CEO can do with four hours of their time — understanding the reality of their own company.

The Eight-Week Rotation

Each week, you spend your four hours in a different function. This ensures you see the entire company over an eight-week cycle, and then you repeat. By month six, you've been through three complete rotations and you have a deep, textured understanding of how every part of your business actually operates.

Week 1: Customer Service / Support

What you do: Sit next to a support rep for four hours. Put on a headset. Listen to calls. Watch how they handle complaints, questions, billing issues, and escalations.

What you're looking for:

- • Do they have clear policies for common issues, or are they guessing?
- • How many times does the customer have to repeat information?
- • What questions keep coming up that suggest a product/service gap?
- • How does the rep feel at the end of a tough call? What support do they have?
- • What's the energy of the team? Are they engaged or burned out?

What you're NOT doing: Jumping on a call and handling it yourself. Correcting the rep in real time. Promising the customer something the rep couldn't. You are an observer.

Week 2: Sales (Live Calls)

What you do: Sit next to a sales rep during a live prospecting or closing call. Not a recorded call — a live one. Watch their process from dial to hang-up.

What you're looking for:

- • Do they follow the script/playbook, or are they improvising?
- • How do they handle the pricing question? The "I need to think about it" objection?
- • Are they making promises about delivery, timelines, or features that you can't keep?
- • How does their pitch compare to what your marketing materials say?
- • Do they know the product deeply, or are they surface-level?

Why live matters: Recorded calls are curated. Reps know which recordings to share. Live calls are unfiltered reality.

Week 3: New Client Onboarding (as a Prospect)

What you do: This is the most revealing exercise you will ever do. Go through your own onboarding process as a fake prospect. Use a different name. Use a personal email. Call your sales line. Fill out the forms. Sign the contract. Experience the first 7–14 days of being a new customer at your own company.

What you're looking for:

- • How long does it take to get a response after the first inquiry?
- • How many forms ask for the same information?
- • How many handoffs happen between initial contact and activation?
- • Does anyone call to check in during the first week?
- • What does the welcome experience feel like? Professional? Chaotic? Forgettable?

Why this is the most important week: Onboarding is where most B2B companies lose clients — not at month 12, at month 1. The experience in the first 14 days determines whether the client stays for years or starts looking for alternatives before they've even fully launched. And most founders have never experienced their own onboarding process as a customer.

Week 4: New Hire Training

What you do: Sit in on a training session for new hires. Or better yet — run one yourself. Teach the material. See what questions come up.

What you're looking for:

- • Is the training material current? Does it reflect today's pricing, positioning, and processes?
- • Are new hires learning what they actually need to know, or just checking boxes?
- • How confident do new hires feel after training? Do they know what "good" looks like in their role?
- • Is the training interactive or is it a PowerPoint that someone reads aloud?
- • How long until a new hire is actually productive?

Week 5: Account Management / Client Meetings

What you do: Sit in on a client meeting — a QBR, a check-in, a strategy session. Listen to how your account managers interact with clients.

What you're looking for:

- • Are the conversations proactive (bringing value) or reactive (responding to complaints)?
- • Does the AM know the client's business, or are they reading from a report?
- • How does the client feel about the relationship? (Body language tells you more than words.)
- • Are there upsell or cross-sell opportunities the AM is missing?
- • What complaints or frustrations come up that you've never heard about?

Week 6: Interview Observation

What you do: Sit in on a hiring interview. Don't participate — observe. Watch how your managers evaluate candidates.

What you're looking for:

- • Are they using a structured interview process, or winging it?
- • Are they assessing for the right traits? (The Five A's from Principle #6)
- • Would you hire this person based on what you heard?
- • How is your company being represented to candidates? Is the pitch compelling?
- • Are the interviewers selling the opportunity, or just screening?

Week 7: Delivery / Operations

What you do: Shadow the team that actually delivers your product or service. Watch them work. See the handoff from sales to delivery. Follow a project or engagement from assignment to completion.

What you're looking for:

- • Is there a clear process, or is every engagement handled differently?
- • Where are the bottlenecks? What steps take the longest?

- • Are the tools and systems adequate, or are people working around broken processes?
- • What does "done" look like? Who checks quality before it reaches the client?
- • What would a client say about the quality of what's being delivered?

Week 8: Office Floor Walk

What you do: No agenda. Walk the floor. Eat lunch in the break room. Stop by desks. Have casual conversations. Listen to the ambient energy of the company.

What you're looking for:

- • What's the mood? Are people energized or going through the motions?
- • What are people talking about informally? (The hallway conversation tells you more than any survey.)
- • Is the physical environment helping or hurting? (Broken equipment, messy spaces, missing supplies.)
- • Who seems engaged? Who seems checked out?
- • What would a new hire think on their first day walking through this office?

Then start over at Week 1 with Customer Service and repeat the cycle.

The Three Questions: Your Observation Framework

Every time you spend your four hours in the business, your notes must answer three questions. These are not optional. Write them down before you leave.

1. What's Working?

Find the good. Name it. This is how you know what to protect, celebrate, and scale. If Elena in customer service has built an incredible process for handling billing disputes — even though you never asked her to — that's a system worth documenting and replicating. If a sales rep has a beautiful objection handler you've never heard — that belongs in the playbook.

Why this matters: Most founders only look for what's broken. When you also look for what's working, you find the hidden excellence in your organization — the things your best people are doing that nobody has noticed, documented, or scaled.

2. What's Broken?

Identify the systemic issue — not the person. When you see a rep fumble the pricing question, the broken thing is not the rep. It's the fact that there's no clear pricing script in the playbook. When you see a client asked for the same information three times, the broken thing is the data handoff between systems.

The discipline: Always frame what's broken as a process issue, not a people issue. If five different reps are all fumbling the same question, the problem is the training or the playbook — not five people independently deciding to be bad at their jobs.

3. What Didn't I Know?

This is the highest-value column. Write down every single thing you observed that surprised you. Every policy you didn't know existed (or didn't exist). Every workaround your team has built that you've never seen. Every client complaint you've never heard.

The "didn't know" column is where the real ROI of this habit lives. These are the things that would have festered for months — or years — if you hadn't been in the room to see them.

The Critical Rule: Observer, Not Firefighter

This rule is the difference between a CEO who learns and a CEO who becomes the problem.

When you go in the business, **you do not fix things on the spot.** You do not jump on the call. You do not correct the rep. You do not march into the kitchen and reorganize the supply closet. You observe. You take notes. You leave.

Then, back at your desk, you work with the appropriate leader to fix the issue systemically.

Why this rule exists:

If you fix things on the floor, three catastrophic things happen:

1. **You bypass your managers.** When the CEO swoops in and solves a problem directly, the manager is undermined. The team learns: "Skip my boss, wait for the CEO." Your management layer becomes decorative.

2. **You train dependency.** Every time you fix something live, your team learns that problems get solved when you show up. They stop solving problems on their own. They stop escalating to their managers. They wait for Wednesday afternoon when you walk the floor.

3. **You become the bottleneck again.** The whole point of scaling is getting yourself out of the daily operations. If you fix things live, you're volunteering to be the most expensive individual contributor in the building. You're working *in* the business in exactly the way the old advice warned you about — not as an observer gathering intelligence, but as a firefighter fighting fires.

The correct process: 1. Observe the issue. Write it down. 2. Leave. 3. In your next leadership meeting, raise the issue with the appropriate leader. 4. Frame it as a system problem: *"When I sat with customer service last Wednesday, I noticed there's no documented policy for [X]. Elena has been improvising for six months. Can we get that documented this week?"* 5. Let the leader own the fix. Follow up to confirm it happened.

You are an intelligence-gathering system. Not a repair crew.

The Compound Effect

One half-day a week = four hours. Four hours × 52 weeks = 208 hours per year. 208 hours ÷ 8-hour days = **26 full days per year inside your business.**

Twenty-six days of ground truth. Twenty-six observations feeding your strategy. Twenty-six weeks of discoveries that would otherwise have stayed invisible until they showed up as revenue loss, churn, or turnover.

The founders who do this consistently for 2–3 years build companies that feel astonishingly well-run. Not because the CEO is a genius. Because the CEO actually knows what's happening — and feeds that knowledge into the systems that run the company.

The founders who skip it build companies that look great on the dashboard and feel broken to the people inside them. The numbers look fine — until they don't. And when they stop looking fine, the CEO has no idea why, because they haven't been close enough to the operation to see the cracks forming.

The "Bob Johnson" Test

At least once per quarter, go through your own company's experience as a customer. Use a fake name. Use a personal email. Call the main line. Fill out the web form. Request a demo. Sign a contract. Go through onboarding.

Document every touchpoint. Time every response. Note every handoff. Count how many times you're asked for the same information. Pay attention to how it *feels* — not how it looks on a process diagram.

This is the most uncomfortable thing you will ever do as a CEO. And it is the most valuable.

What founders typically discover on the Bob Johnson test:

- • Response time is 2–3x longer than they thought.
- • The first email the prospect receives is generic, impersonal, or confusing.
- • The sales call doesn't match the marketing message.
- • The contract process has friction points nobody has addressed because nobody important has gone through it recently.
- • Onboarding involves 3–5 redundant data collection steps.
- • Nobody calls to check in during the first week.
- • The activation experience is forgettable — not bad, just forgettable.

Most of these issues aren't hard to fix. They're invisible. That's the problem. They've been invisible because the one person with the authority to fix them systemically — the CEO — hasn't experienced them.

Warning Signs You've Disconnected

If three or more of these are true, you need to start the weekly habit immediately:

- • You haven't taken a customer service call in more than 90 days.
- • You couldn't describe, in detail, what your onboarding process feels like to a new client.
- • Your training materials have pricing or positioning from a prior version of your company.
- • When something breaks, you find out from a dashboard, not from a person.
- • You spend more than 80% of your time in meetings *about* the work versus seeing the work.
- • You've been surprised by a client complaint in the last quarter and thought: "How did I not know about this?"
- • Your team has workarounds for broken processes that you've never been told about.
- • You couldn't name, right now, the three biggest frustrations your customer service team faces daily.
- • The last time you sat next to someone on your team and watched them work was more than six months ago.
- • You've said the phrase "I trust my team" as a reason not to observe operations. (Trust and verification are not opposites. They're partners.)

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Mistake #1: Doing it once and calling it done. One day on the floor is tourism. A weekly habit is intelligence. The value compounds over time — you start noticing patterns, trends, and systemic issues that a single visit would never reveal.

Mistake #2: Fixing things on the spot. You are an observer, not a firefighter. See the rule above. This mistake is so common and so destructive that it deserves its own section (above).

Mistake #3: Warning people you're coming. If you tell the team "the CEO is visiting on Wednesday," they clean up. They perform. They hide the problems. Show up unannounced, or at least don't make it a production. The goal is to see reality, not a rehearsal.

Mistake #4: Only looking for what's broken. If you only bring back bad news, your team will start dreading your visits. Always lead with what's working. Always recognize the good you see. The observation habit should make your team feel seen, not surveilled.

Mistake #5: Not acting on what you learn. If you observe problems and nothing changes, your team stops believing the habit matters. Every observation must flow into a system fix, assigned to an owner, with a follow-up date. The cycle is: observe → document → assign → fix → verify.

Mistake #6: Delegating the observation. You cannot send your COO to do this for you. You cannot read someone else's notes and call it the same thing. The value is in your own eyes, ears, and instincts — calibrated over decades of building companies — processing the raw information firsthand. Your COO should also be doing this. But it doesn't replace you doing it.

Quick-Start Checklist

Use this checklist to implement Principle #3 this week:

- ✓ ☐ Open your calendar right now
- ✓ ☐ Block 4 hours per week, same day, same time, for the next 6 months
- ✓ ☐ Title it: IN THE BUSINESS — DO NOT BOOK
- ✓ ☐ Create the Observation Log (use the template: Date / Area / Working / Broken / Didn't Know / Action / Owner)
- ✓ ☐ Week 1: Sit with customer service. Listen to calls. Take notes.
- ✓ ☐ After the session: fill in all three columns (Working / Broken / Didn't Know)
- ✓ ☐ In your next leadership meeting: share one finding and assign the fix
- ✓ ☐ Week 2: Ride along on a live sales call
- ✓ ☐ Week 3: Go through onboarding as a fake prospect (the Bob Johnson test)
- ✓ ☐ Week 4: Sit in on new hire training
- ✓ ☐ Continue the 8-week rotation
- ✓ ☐ Quarterly: repeat the full Bob Johnson test
- ✓ ☐ Never skip a week. Never move the calendar block. Never stop.

Implementation Tools

Ready-to-use templates for this Growth Factor

XLSX **CEO Observation Log**

Columns: Date, Area Observed, What's Working, What's Broken, What I Didn't Know, Action Item, +1 more

PDF **8-Week Rotation Calendar**

Populated with which function to shadow each week

PDF **Bob Johnson Test Scorecard**

By-touchpoint evaluation template

PDF **Observation-to-Action Tracker**

→ owner → fix → verified

PDF **Department Rotation Schedule**

Which function to visit each week for 8 weeks

This is Principle #3 of 50. Recognition (Principle #1) creates the environment. Accountability (Principle #2) sets the standard. Being in the business (Principle #3) gives you the ground truth to make both of them real. You can't recognize what you don't see, and you can't hold people accountable to a standard you've never observed.

Get the book: The 50 Factor by Scott Scully