Why This Book

Running a business is hard work. If you recently started, you might be facing unbelievable financial pressures. Maybe you pulled equity out of your house and maxed out your credit cards to monetize your dream. Now you're not sure if you can pay down that debt. If you've been at this awhile, you might be struggling with scaling your operations to meet demand. Maybe you keep hiring the wrong employees over and over and wonder if there's anyone who can work successfully inside your organization. Some of you might even be contemplating your exit. This book is for all of you.

The "tyranny of the urgent" clocks in every morning at your office, factory, restaurant, or practice. It never misses a day, and it always puts in a full day's work. It manifests itself in the underperforming vendor, the chronically late employee, the unreasonably demanding customer, and the broken-down delivery truck. It pulls you away from planning for future growth, working on organizational health, and developing your team.

I get it. And that's why I wrote this book. It's a bit of accountability sitting on your desk or Kindle bidding you to step away from the tyranny of the urgent and spend thirty minutes a week deliberately making your organization healthier. It covers a lot of territory—problems that keep my business owner clients up at night. It's not high-minded theory. It's practical and actionable. But that doesn't mean it's mindless. It asks hard questions and provokes deep thought about your personal and professional growth, the growth of your team, the kind of organization you want to be (both internally and externally), and the tools and methodologies you're using to increase revenues, decrease costs, and fatten up the bottom line. It seeks to strike the right balance between being (who we are) and doing (how we act).

The chapters take five or six minutes to read. Then, there's an exercise. Some weeks, you can complete the entire exercise in thirty minutes.

Other weeks, the thirty-minute exercise gets you ready for some homework you need to complete with your team.

- **It's multidisciplinary.** There are chapters on operations, finance, strategy, marketing, culture, personal growth, and more. I'm guessing most of them will apply in your organization, but some might not.
- **It's utilitarian.** The exercises walk you through exactly what you need to do to shore up that discipline in your organization.
- **It's transformative.** And really, that's the whole idea. The challenge baked into the *One-Year, Thirty-Minute Business Transformation* is to deliberately invest thirty minutes each week in your personal and professional growth, the growth of your people, and your organization's health to make it the company you've always dreamed of.
- **It's hard.** At least some of the weeks. You might be stepping into areas that aren't exactly in your wheelhouse. That's OK. You'll see that I admit to a few of those myself over the course of the book. To build the organization you've always dreamed of, every discipline needs to run the right way.
- **It's satisfying.** At the end of the fifty-two weeks, you'll be amazed at the transformation. You'll change, your team members will change, and your organization will change. And you'll be equipped with tools that will help you keep the organization healthy and growing for years to come.
- **You're not alone.** It's tough being the boss. Who do you talk to when you're not sure what to do? You might be a bit reluctant to talk to your team—they're looking to you for the answers, right? The book has a companion website, oneyearthirtyminute.com. You'll find additional resources there (explained in the next chapter), and you'll find an online community where you can ask questions and interact with others facing the same struggles.

Finally, I want to be a resource for you as you read through the book and afterward. Feel free to send questions, comments, and stories of transformation or struggle to mchirveno@clearvision.consulting.

Thanks for reading,

Mike Chirveno

How it Works

The idea behind the One-Year, Thirty-Minute Business Transformation is to digest and implement one discipline each week for a year. Each chapter lays out the case for shoring up that discipline in your organization, then jumps into an exercise.

Some disciplines are people focused. Some are process focused. Some are customer facing. Some are employee facing. Some build hard skills. Some build soft skills. That's part of the challenge of being a business owner. You have to manage all the disciplines in the organization. For those disciplines that don't come naturally to you, you have to either learn them or surround yourself with people who excel in them.

You don't have to follow the exercises in order, but I have included a couple of things at the beginning of the book that, if left unattended, could cause you some heartburn. If there's an area that's causing you some sleepless nights now, find it in the table of contents and dig in.

Regardless of the order, here's what I suggest you do. Pick your chapter for the week and set aside uninterrupted time to read it carefully—don't let anything displace that appointment. Jot down anything that especially resonates with you. Some of the chapters suggest that you do the exercise alone. Some suggest you do the exercise with your team. For the team exercises, get the chapter contents to your team, so they can read it too. The exercises themselves are very straightforward. I'll walk you through the activities that will install that discipline in your organization. When you do an exercise, do it well. Be honest about the state of your organization. Ask hard questions. Don't make excuses. Implement completely. Don't skimp. Finish what you start.

For every chapter you can find resources at the book's companion website:

oneyearthirtyminute.com

You'll be able download forms, checklists, and supplemental materials. For team exercises, print copies of the forms for everyone involved. On the website you'll also find a place to share your One-Year, Thirty-Minute Business Transformation successes and struggles so that other business owners can benefit from your application of the information in the book. You'll have to register the first time you want to download info or join the discussion forum, but after that, all the content will be available. I want to hear from you too. You can email me at mchirveno@clearvision.consulting or message me on the book website.

I also think there's another very effective way to use the book. Buy a copy for each member of your leadership team, assign a chapter for the week, and use it as a discussion guide for the last thirty minutes of your weekly staff meeting. That will ensure that at least part of your week is devoted to working *on* the business and not just *in* it.

I'm committed to the success of business owners. This is one small contribution to that group of people that I admire greatly, people who have risked their personal treasure and banked on their God-given talent to build a better life for themselves and their family.

Good luck.

Week 1 :: People :: Critical Path

“If he leaves, we’re screwed.”

I was part of that conversation. In fact, I was the “he” that was going to screw the company by my departure. I left a few months after the conversation. I’m not sure my former employer was “screwed,” but when I resigned to start my consulting firm, my former employer was my first client and remained a client for the next seven years, accounting for a substantial part of my early consulting revenue. Through a series of circumstances that are too boring to recount here, I was the only person in the company that had a certain set of skills and information vital to my division’s operational success. I had become part of the “Critical Path.” The sequence of events needed to complete necessary tasks ran through me. I continued to complete those tasks but now was being paid as a consultant. The consulting work included training others to assume those duties and, in some cases, doing the work myself until the project was completed several years later.

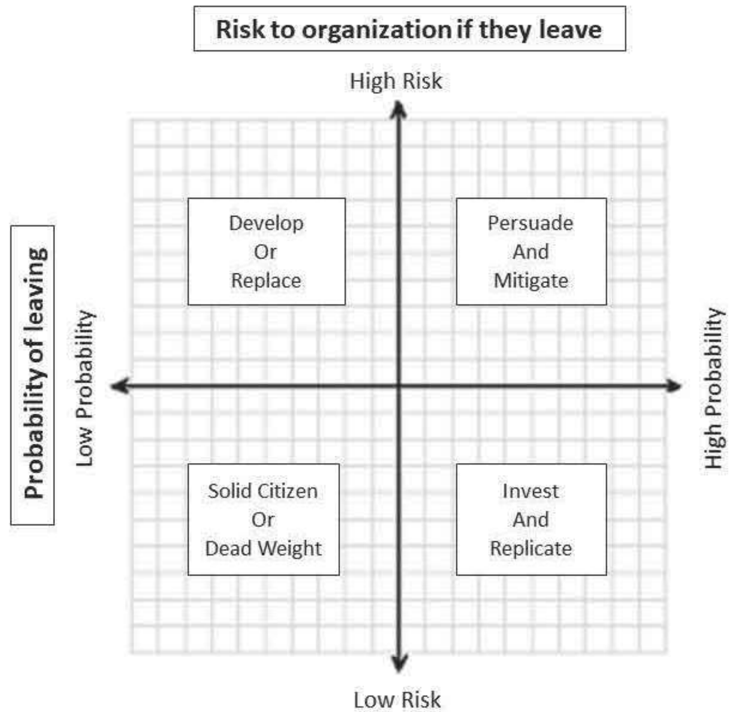
As I began consulting, I found out that my situation in my former work life wasn’t unique. There are lots of organizations that pivot on the knowledge and skills of one or two people. If one of those people gets hit by the proverbial bus, the organization suffers. The degree of suffering ranges from strongly inconvenienced to an inability to execute core value-creation activities, putting the company’s existence in jeopardy.

This week’s One-Year, Thirty-Minute Business Transformation is all about mitigating that risk–the risk of having all your operational “eggs in one basket.”

Let’s jump in.

- List three people whose absence, if they quit or were unable to work, would have significant operational impact on the business.
- For each of those people, identify the operational impact.

- On the graph below, plot the three people listed above based on their probability of leaving and the risk to the organization if they were to leave.



Presumably, if they made it into this exercise, they're going to land in the top half of the graph—i.e., their departure poses a risk to the organization. There are two situations that could make a departure particularly perilous:

- The employee is a critical path component in your company's delivery of products or services—i.e., if this employee were gone, your ability to generate revenue would be crippled. Depending on the length of the absence and the depth of this employee's involvement in critical path activities, this could put the entire enterprise at risk.

- The employee is a *single point of failure*—i.e., this employee is the only one who possesses a particular skill or a particular body of knowledge.

In either of these situations, the urgency for addressing a departure ratchets up significantly. For this exercise, the action items below assume the only variable is the employee's decision to stay or go. However, no person or company is exempt from unplanned events. That being the case, addressing these critical path employee issues is always urgent, even if the current employee is the most loyal and dependable in the organization.

For all the employees in this exercise (on both sides of the vertical axis), create the list below.

Employee	Most Critical Skill	Successor	Percent Ready
Mary	*Set up new vendor*	*Hannah*	*50*
Bob	*Enter new orders*	*Alice*	*20*
Mary	*Do Payroll*	*Steve*	*0*
Tim	*Update Admin Settings in CRM*	*Sarah*	*80*

It's possible, maybe even desirable, that a single employee will be listed more than once. If they have more than one critical path skill or single point of failure capability, you might want to split those skills and capabilities among multiple successors, thereby eliminating the single point of failure. List the successors and their percent of readiness.

Create an action plan for each successor to make them proficient in the critical path responsibilities. The plan should include

- knowledge to acquire,
- skills to master,
- experience to accumulate,

- and relationships necessary for execution and support.

Assign mentors for each activity (it's most likely the current employee but could be someone else), establish milestones, and set target completion dates. Check in with the mentors and successors to ensure that skills transfer is taking place.

If you have no one in the organization who could successfully execute the work of these critical path employees, start the process of recruiting, hiring, and onboarding suitable successors. In addition to your normal regimen of finding new employees with shared values and cultural fit, add the skills required for these tasks to the job requirements.

For those employees who plot to the right of the vertical axis (high risk to the organization and likely to leave), move quickly to mitigate the risk. What can you do to keep them in the organization until you've identified and trained a successor? If they are seeking greater challenges, can you assign them more interesting work while they identify and train their own successor? Given the critical nature of the activities it might be unlikely, but can you identify a vendor, contractor, or consultant who could step in if the employee's departure put the business at risk?

Finally, a bit of homework (definitely more than the thirty-minute exercise). Document the work of every critical path employee. Create documentation that details

- the "why" behind each of their activities,
- the people they interact with to accomplish the activities—vendors, customers, peers, supervisors, and subordinates,
- the systems they use (including usernames and passwords),
- the data they enter into those systems,
- any equipment they use to perform the work,
- who they call if that equipment malfunctions,
- any materials they use to perform the work,

- where they obtain replacement materials,
- any reports they use to inform their work,
- any notifications they make prior to, during, or after the work,
- and finally, complete, step-by-step instructions for the work itself.

If successors are not on board when you start this documentation process, you might have to do it yourself to make sure it's complete and easy to follow.