

# THE Hand Up PROJECT



EDITION  
ONE

Real wisdom from  
women who've been  
exactly where you are

THE  
**lever**



You are not the only one who has more  
on your plate than feels manageable  
and you're not the only one wondering  
whether everyone else has figured  
something out that you haven't.

**They haven't.**





I built a seven-figure agency over 28 years. From the outside it looked like pure success, from the inside I was the one making every decision, answering every question, sitting at the dinner table mentally answering emails, while the people I loved were talking.



Justine

— Justine  
Founder, The Lever

The turning point wasn't a strategy session. It was the moment I realised I hadn't built a business. I had built a very expensive, very exhausting job.

I built The Lever because I needed what we offer clients. Not advice, not more hands doing stuff, but a real partner who understood that getting your business off your back starts with being honest about what it's costing you.

When I asked ten successful women to open up, they didn't hesitate.

Because they wanted this conversation as much as I did, the one that never really happens for us as female founders. The one that stays behind closed doors while we grit our teeth and get it done.

I asked them what actually changed things. Who they hired, what they let go of, what nearly broke them, and when they finally stopped waiting for permission to trust.

What came back wasn't advice. It was a hand up.

This is yours.

Theme #1

# The Hire that Changed Everything



Almost every founder we spoke to named a person, not a system, as the thing that changed how they operated. A VA, an EA, an assistant GM, a business coach. The common thread wasn't the role, it was the moment they finally let someone else carry part of the load.

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Debra Chantry-Taylor  
*EOS Implementer*



**STOP doing \$25 per hour work, especially the stuff you hate.**

"Lock arms with others who support your vision, rely on their assistance to do the tasks you don't enjoy, and celebrate every little success together."

- Samantha Jung-Fielding,  
*Happinesence*

"Finding the right business coach was the single biggest game-changer. It gave me clarity on what I was building and visibility on where the business could go."

- Claire Jackson, *The Habit Lab*

"I hired people better than me. That translates into innovative thinking, accelerated growth, and gives me the freedom to focus on building a stronger company."

- Midge Hand, *Whippet Digital*

"Having an awesome wing woman EA is invaluable."

- Kate Ashcroft,  
*Ashcroft Mitchell McGregor*



Theme  
#2

# The Control Freak Surrender



At some point, every founder we talked to had to reckon with the same uncomfortable truth: the thing slowing the business down was them. Not their team. Not the market. Them. Here's what happened when they finally let go.

"A business owner should be focused on building a system that could theoretically bake cookies without them."

- Kate Riegle van West, *SpinPoi*

"I had to learn to stop being a control freak. Once I recognised that others' way was sometimes better, it freed me up to do the things I love and am good at. Both businesses have skyrocketed since I changed this mindset."

- Debra Chantry-Taylor, *EOS Implementer*

"Know your business inside out, but make sure you understand every aspect before handing over the reins."

- Pip Malpas, *Little Pips*

"Fire yourself from the daily operations in your business. Spend more time working on the business than in it."

- Midge Hand, *Whippet Digital*

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Cat Macnaughtan  
*Getting Lost*



Taking yourself off email chains, empowering your team to make decisions, doing an honest audit of what your strengths are, that's where leading actually starts.

### Theme #3

# Surviving is not Failing

Nobody talks about the long stretch in the middle where you're not failing but you're not thriving either, and you're not sure if that means something's wrong or if that's just what building something real actually feels like. It's the second one.

"Resilience in business is less about pushing through and more about staying willing to adapt without abandoning the work."

- Claire Jackson,  
*The Habit Lab*

"I was absolutely not needed during our busy times. I could do much more by focusing on the marketing and letting the team focus on what they were doing."

- Cat Macnaughtan,  
*Getting Lost*

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Kate Riegle van West  
*SpinPoi*

I wish someone had told me: if you're trying to build something sustainable over the long term, you may spend quite a while in this middle space where you're mainly maintaining. It's a thing. A lot of founders are there. And it's okay.

"It wasn't a single moment. It was a gradual shift, one thought at a time. Instead of asking how should I do this, I began asking how would I like to do this."  
- Sandra Julian, *sandrajulian.co*

"Consistency beats intensity, so design your habits to keep you going."  
- Samantha Jung-Fielding,  
*Happinesence*





# Burnout is a Systems Failure

Burnout gets treated like a personal failing. Something to push through, recover from, and secretly be embarrassed about. These founders reframe it entirely and once you see it their way, you can't unsee it.

"A business is not sustainable if it relies on you. It needs to be able to run without you and that requires the right people doing the right roles."

- Debra Chantry-Taylor,  
*EOS Implementer*

"Working with a Virtual Business Manager to get systems and processes organised freed up time and enabled scalable growth by reducing the business's dependence on individuals."

- Midge Hand, *Whippet Digital*

"Urgency can help you start. Structure is what let's you stay."

- Claire Jackson,  
*The Habit Lab*

"Well-designed systems create freedom. They allow the business to run without relying on the founder's constant involvement."

- Sandra Julian, *sandrajulian.co*

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Amanda Jeffs, *She is AI*



Burnout isn't a personal failure. It's almost always a systems failure. Sustainable businesses are designed to support the people running them — not rely on their exhaustion to survive.

Theme #5

# Self Trust was the Turning Point



Every founder in this publication arrived at the same place independently. Not through a course, not through a coach, not through a framework. They stopped looking outward for the answer and started trusting what they already knew.

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Sandra Julian  
[sandrajulian.co](http://sandrajulian.co)



The turning point was when I trusted myself. For so long I was looking externally for the answers.

"Trust yourself. No one does things like you, and that is exactly why people will engage with you and your business."

- Kate Riegle van West, *SpinPoi*

"Letting go of the right way and people-pleasing, and learning to make business decisions without taking them personally, that was the shift."

- Amanda Jeffs, *She Is AI*

"I have to have strong boundaries and take care of my own energy to be able to show up well for my clients and my team."

- Kate Ashcroft,  
*Ashcroft Mitchell McGregor*

"For many women, believing in ourselves is often the biggest hurdle. Learning to back myself has changed the way I lead."

- Pip Malpas, *Little Pips*



*What we see*

Every founder in this publication was once exactly where you are now.

Not failing. Not thriving.  
But carrying the mother-load, and wondering if that's just what business feels like.

*It isn't.*

What changed for each of them wasn't working harder. It was finding the right structure, the right people, and the permission to lead differently.

So the only question worth asking right now is this:

What would change for you if you stopped doing it all alone?

# Meet the Contributors!!!



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I want Leverage:

A weekly letter for founders who want a bigger conversation about leadership, freedom, and what it means to build a business that doesn't need you in every single scene.

[www.thelever.co.nz](http://www.thelever.co.nz)