

Founder Bottleneck: When Every Decision Rolls Uphill

How a Fractional COO stabilizes execution and returns the CEO to strategic work



One of our clients came to us with strong demand and a capable team, but the business was quietly dependent on one person. If the owner stepped away, decisions slowed, work stalled, and managers waited for permission. We treated it like an operating system issue, not a motivation issue.

Quick Snapshot

Problem: Founder bottleneck and decision gridlock

Fix: Decision rights + leadership cadence + escalation rules

Result: Faster execution without constant CEO escalation

What we walked into

- Every decision, big or small, landed on the CEO
- Managers escalated issues without options or recommendations
- Meetings stalled without the owner because authority was unclear
- The CEO's inbox and text thread became the real workflow
- Execution paused whenever the owner was unavailable

What we did

- Clarified roles, responsibilities, and decision rights by function
- Created approval thresholds and escalation rules that removed ambiguity
- Coached leaders to bring options, not just problems
- Installed a weekly operating rhythm with clear owners and deadlines
- Implemented a simple decision log to build consistency and trust

What changed

- Managers began making decisions within clear boundaries
- Escalations decreased and became higher quality
- Projects kept moving even when the CEO was not present
- The CEO reclaimed time for strategy, client relationships, and growth

Best fit when

- The owner approves too many routine decisions
- Mid-level leaders are unsure what they can decide
- Execution depends on the CEO's availability
- Growth is limited by leadership bandwidth

Typical first 30-day focus

- Leadership interviews and workflow mapping
- RACI and decision-rights alignment
- Escalation paths and approval thresholds
- Operating cadence and scorecard launch

Want to see the decision-rights template? Contact: BenJoeM@Marklandventures.com www.marklandventures.com