

LEAD LIKE A CEO

Next Level Leadership Skills for Small Business Owners

COURSE GUIDE



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Introduction

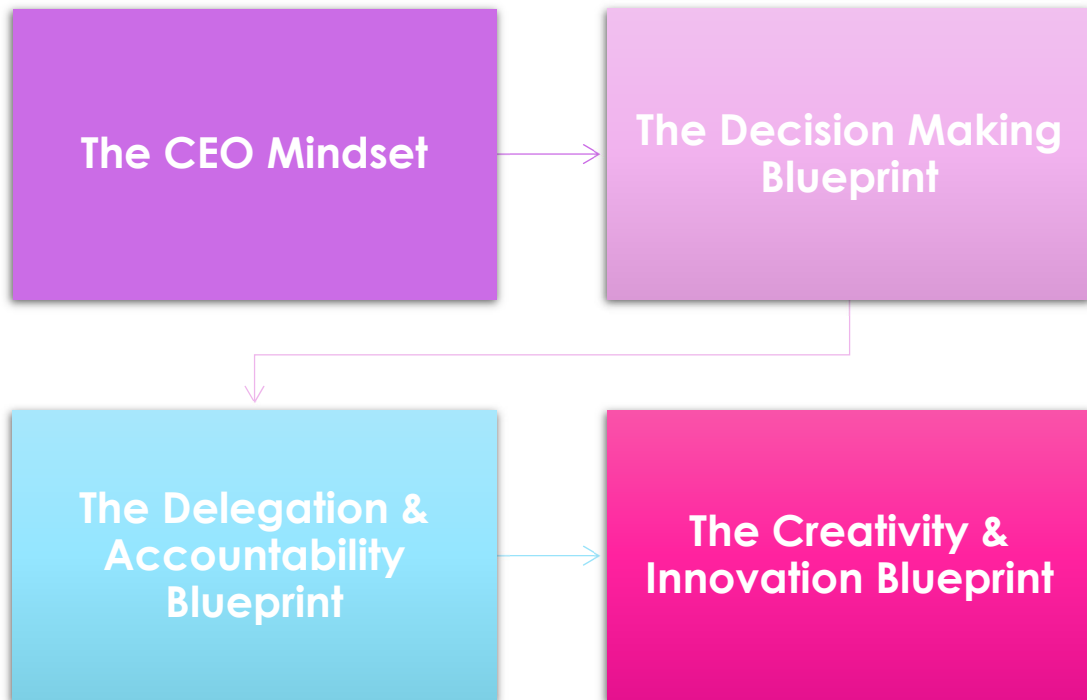
None of us is born with an entrepreneurial playbook in our heads. We learn what to do as we go along. As businesses grow, the person at the top has to step out of the day-to-day and take responsibility for the bigger picture.

You may have started your business on your own, doing everything by yourself. But if you want your business to expand, that has to change. The higher up in an organization you go, the more thinking, planning, and strategizing you need to do. Taking on the mantle of the CEO means that you can no longer oversee all aspects of the business, and this can be a challenge. After all, you've invested a great deal in the development of your business, and it can be hard to let go of control. But in order to scale and grow, you need to seek the help of others.

When your business starts taking off, you're ready to scale up. At this point, you must stop thinking of yourself as a solo entrepreneur and start thinking of yourself as the CEO of your company. If you remain in the mindset of a one-person operation, then you won't be able to grow. You'll never have the time, energy, or expertise to do everything by yourself, and your business won't be the success it has the potential to be.

In this course, you'll discover that thinking like a CEO will turn you into one. You'll develop the right mindset and the key skills you need to carry out the role and create the results you want in your business. You'll discover proven step-by-step processes to help you delegate, Make decisions, and promote innovation, so that by the end of the course, you'll be strategizing like the CEO you are, and business growth will follow.

Here is your roadmap through the course:



Learning Objectives:

By the time you complete this course, you'll be able to:

- Clarify where and how you need to change your mindset, so that you can become a strategic CEO and successfully scale your business
- Increase decisiveness and make quick, informed, and aligned decisions, so that you can optimize your time, prevent bottlenecks in business operations, and be satisfied with the results of your decisions

- Gain confidence in delegating day-to-day tasks and decisions and increase team accountability, so you can free up your time to focus on the big picture and strategy side of your business
- Make the most of a proven creative process to encourage innovative thinking that will impact your unique value and long-term business growth.
- Consolidate and implement your learning and plan future action steps so you can achieve the goals you set for this course

This course is broken down into 5 modules to take you step-by-step through the key skills you need in order to Take Control Of Your Business.

The modules follow a logical order, so while you can skip around if you want, it's best to work through them one at a time.

As you go through each module, use your Action Guide to help you complete the Action Steps at the end of each.

Expectations

Before we start the course, take a minute to think about what you want to get out of it.

In the Action Guide, write down three skills you expect to gain.

Now that you're clear about what you want this course to deliver, we can get started.

Module 1 – The CEO Mindset

A successful CEO needs both a certain mindset and skill set.

Let's start with the key areas where you need to demonstrate skill. These include the following five which you, as CEO, must be able to do:

1. Measure and analyze everything

2. Focus on your ultimate goals

3. Remain flexible

4. Stay open to innovation

5. Motivate those who work with you

1. Measure and analyze everything that your business does to monitor progress and identify ways to improve.
2. Focus on your ultimate goals and develop strategies that will lead to their achievement.
3. Remain flexible so that you can change course when needed to suit customer demands and market changes.

4. Stay open to innovation and improved ways of doing business in order to keep existing customers and gain new business.
5. Motivate those who work with you to contribute their best and show them respect and consideration. If you don't have a team yet, then this includes strategic alliance partners, networking colleagues, suppliers, and so on.

There may be other elements you'd want to add to this list, but even these five skills make being a CEO a tough assignment. Look at that list again with your solo-entrepreneur hat on. You'll realize that you've already been doing these things to some extent to get your business to this point. You may struggle with certain skills on this list, but keep in mind that these skills can all be developed over time with the right approach and mindset.

Reflect on the five areas and honestly appraise your current level of competence in each. In this way, you can identify the areas you'll need to focus on as you develop your CEO thinking. For example, you may consider that you're flexible and willing to make changes to suit your market but that you're not as good at finding ways to innovate around what you already provide.

Your Mindset

In addition to skills, you need the self-confidence of a leader to be able to succeed at the head of your business. This doesn't mean that you have all the answers, or you think you always know best. It's a confident person who can say, "I don't know, but I'll find out." The key is having the confidence to set the direction of your business for yourself, without needing to be told what to do.

Here are the important aspects of the CEO mindset



- Ability to set the direction for the business and make long-term decisions
- Respectful and considerate of other people
- Open to new ideas
- Ability to listen to others and ask for feedback
- Ability to step out of the day-to-day and see the big picture

- Focused and motivated on your goals
- Ability to inspire others with your vision
- Positive even in the face of challenges
- Problem solver when things go wrong
- Taking full responsibility and not apportioning blame

You'll complete the **CEO Mindset Checklist** at the end of this module to get a sense of where you're at today.

Above all, when you start thinking like a CEO, you accept that you need to approach the overview in a structured way and work through others to get things done.

Strategic Direction

The CEO is the ultimate decision maker when it comes to setting the strategic direction of the business. This includes the overall vision and the plans that must be put in place to achieve that vision.

There are some key strategies you need to have in place to grow your business. These include:



Financial Strategy

Here, you set targets for how much money comes into your business and how much money goes out. It includes budgets and resource allocation as well as any future investment in the business and related expenditure.

Product Strategy

The first step is to decide what products or services you're going to sell and who's expected to buy. It's likely that you've already made this decision, so you need to be strategizing around your next steps and how you can develop your offerings.

For example, if you currently sell one-on-one coaching services, you might decide to leverage your time and run group coaching sessions or online courses. Or, if you sell door handles in wood, and the trend becomes door handles in stainless steel, you'll probably decide to adapt your supply and sell what your customers want.

Marketing Strategy

It's difficult to sell anything if you don't market your products and services. Rather than a 'spray and pray' approach, a structured strategy will serve you best. This will include not just sales promotion, but also how you'll build your brand, use social media, and demonstrate value so that you can provide what customers want and keep them coming back for more.

All of these strategies are interdependent and should go hand in hand. For example, if you want to revamp your products or services to fit new customer demand, you'll have to consider the financial requirements and how you'll market the new offering.

It's also important to remember that these strategies are separate from the day-to-day operations which will bring them about, and which could be carried out by other people. As CEO, you can't afford to lose this overview and allow yourself to be drowned in daily tasks. Before you take on a new project or plan to create a new stream of income, ask how that will help you reach your long-term goal. If the answer is that it won't, then shelve the idea and come back to it another time.

Delegation is a key skill for CEOs, and you'll learn more in a later module about how you can delegate and free up time to focus on the big picture.

Your Current Strategy Position

The most effective strategies are simple and structured, and they will lead you to achieve your business goals.

You may already have strategies in place that work for you, and that's great. But if you don't, or you're only strong on one aspect, then it's useful to reflect on how strategic you're being at the moment in each of the three areas.

Review your own strategies and how you came up with them. This will help you highlight where you need to take action. Answer these questions:

What is your company's overall strategy on Finance, Products/Services and Marketing?

Where do you lack strategic direction?

How often do you discuss strategy?

How does your lack of strategy affect your business outcomes and growth?

- What is your company's overall strategy on:
 - Finance?
 - Products/services?
 - Marketing?
- Where do you lack strategic direction? If you find it challenging to write down the tactics and actions you take to reach your business goals and be competitive, then you'll lack a structured path to move forward.
- How often do you discuss strategy? Are there recurring themes in those meetings? Even if you're just sitting down with yourself, you need to make a schedule to regularly evaluate your business strategies and whether they're catering to the current market. In this way, you can spot small issues before they become major ones and make the necessary changes as you go along.

- How does your lack of strategy affect your business outcomes and growth? Refer to concrete data to help you such as sales figures or the number of email subscribers or followers.

In the next module, you'll be looking at decision-making and learn a proven process to help with making strategic choices.

Action Steps:

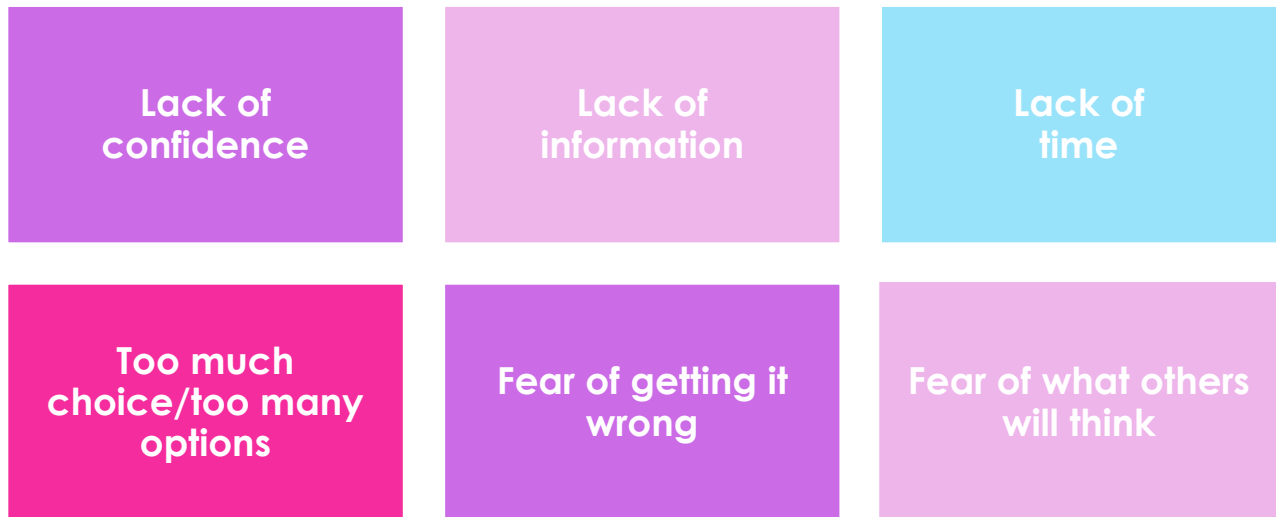
1. Look at the 5 key skill areas for CEOs and note down which you find easiest and which are more challenging to you. Identify the areas you'll need to focus on as you develop your CEO thinking:
 - a. Measure and analyze
 - b. Focus on your ultimate goals
 - c. Stay flexible
 - d. Keep open to innovation
 - e. Motivate those who work with you
2. Complete **The CEO Mindset Checklist**.
3. Review your current strategy position by answering these questions:
 - a. What is your company's overall strategy on:
 - o Finance?
 - o Products/services?
 - o Marketing?
 - b. Where do you lack strategic direction?
 - c. How often do you discuss strategy? Are there recurring themes in those meetings?
 - d. How does lack of direction affect your business outcomes and growth?

Module 2 – The Decision Making Blueprint

What's Difficult About Decision-Making?

It can be tough being a business owner faced with decisions every day. However, that is the reality of the role. Decisions range from small to large in scope, both in terms of the resources involved and the impact that they have.

Even though it's a commonplace activity, many entrepreneurs have trouble making decisions. This can be for a number of reasons, such as:



- Lack of confidence – *I'm really not sure I can do this*
- Lack of information – *I don't know enough about the possibilities*
- Lack of time – *I don't have time to think about this now*
- Too much choice/too many options – *I could go in many different directions*
- Fear of getting it wrong – *I might make the wrong decision*
- Fear of what others will think - *If this goes wrong, then what will my team think of me?*

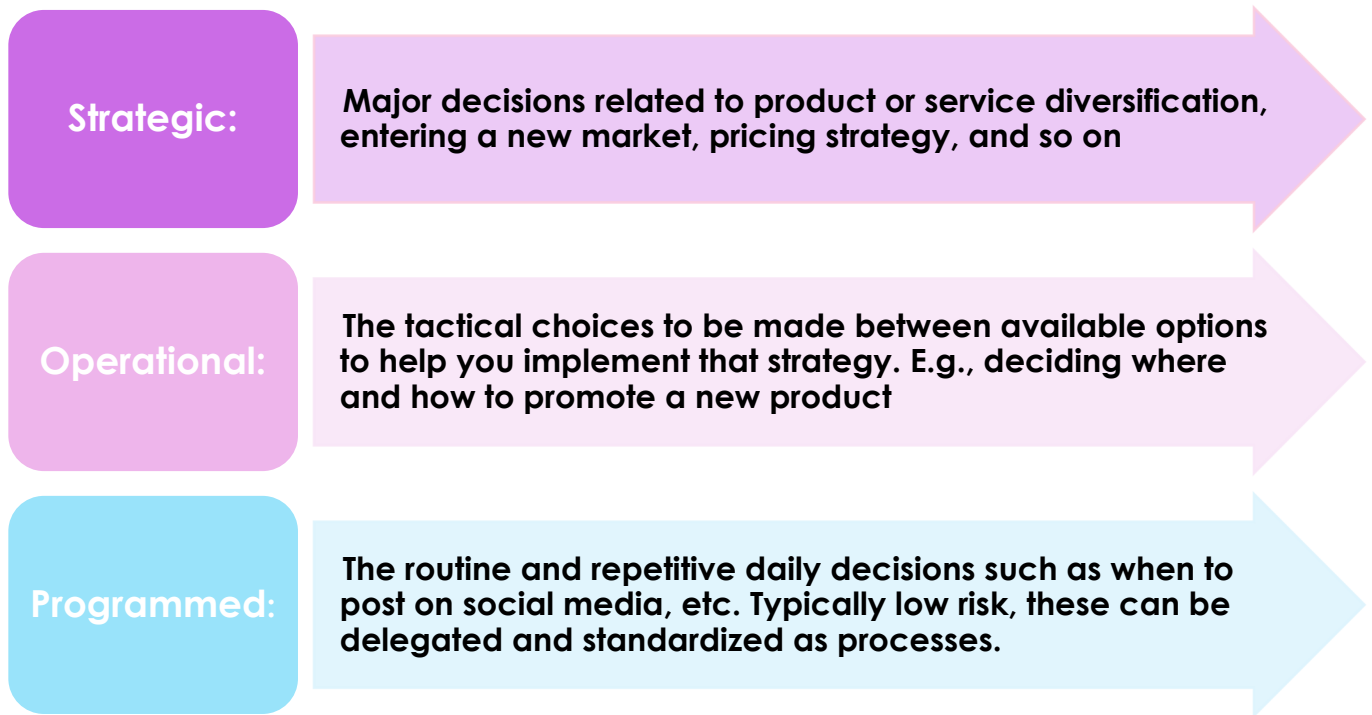
You might find some of these responses familiar. However, the more you develop your CEO mindset, the more confident you'll become. This will help you get better at the decision-making process.

Decision Types

Often, entrepreneurs confuse the type of decision that needs to be made. They spend hours agonizing over something that doesn't really influence their bottom line yet make a snap decision over something that will have lasting impact on their business.

As CEO, you need to be familiar with distinguishing between the decisions you make to set your strategic direction and those that affect your day-to-day operations.

These decisions can be classified in different ways:



- **Strategic:** These are the major decisions we discussed in the last module which affect the entirety of your business. They are decisions related to product or service diversification, entering a new market, pricing strategy, making a major branding change, advertising strategy, and so on.
- **Operational:** Once you've set your overall strategy, then there are the tactical choices to be made between available options to help you implement that strategy. For example, deciding where and how to promote a new product or service.
- **Programmed:** These are the routine and repetitive decisions which take place on a daily basis, such as when to post on social media, how to contact existing customers, etc. They are generally low risk

decisions, and so can be delegated to others or even replaced with a standard procedure that guides future action. In other words, someone else in your team can follow the procedure and no decision is needed unless the situation changes.

All the decisions you make should ultimately lead to the achievement of your goals. However, some decisions have more influence on your overall business strategy than others. For example, if you decide today to commit to a 10k spend on advertising this month when you have little revenue coming in, this would be a big risk to the business. However, if you decide on a limited 8-week campaign with a \$500 total limit, that won't upset the delicate balance of your business too much.

The 5-Step Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process is one of the most critical processes in your business. You want to aim for effective and efficient decisions that will bring about the strategic results you want.

Perhaps you already have a defined system for making decisions, or perhaps it's all a bit haphazard. When you think back to decisions you've made recently, are you aware that you were following a process?

As in other aspects of your CEO role, it's best to have structure in your decision-making. The 5-Step Decision Making Process in this module can be used for all your decisions no matter whether they are strategic or operational.

To make an operational decision using the process won't take you very long and you'll come out with thought-through actions to resolve your dilemma.



- **Step 1** - Define exactly what decision needs to be made. Use these questions to help you:
 - Why is a decision needed?
 - When does the decision need to be taken?
 - Who will be impacted by this decision?
 - What information do you already have?
- **Step 2** - List your alternative courses of action
- **Step 3** - Do a reality check. Which of your possibilities is most likely to bring about a successful outcome given where you are right now?
- **Step 4** - Choose an option and implement it
- **Step 5** - Review and evaluate its effectiveness. Take the time to evaluate what's gone on in an impartial way. Some decisions don't provoke the outcomes you wanted. This will help you in your decision-making next time

Here's an example of a typical business situation.

You notice that your revenue targets haven't been met over the last quarter and you know that you need to bring in some money over the next month because if you don't, you'll get behind on your annual targets and may have problems paying some bills. You list your possibilities, which could be to:

1. Package up and sell a new product.
2. Have a flash sale of existing stock.
3. Offer an opportunity to purchase an advance supply of goods/services at a discount.
4. Promote a premium service to a few chosen customers.

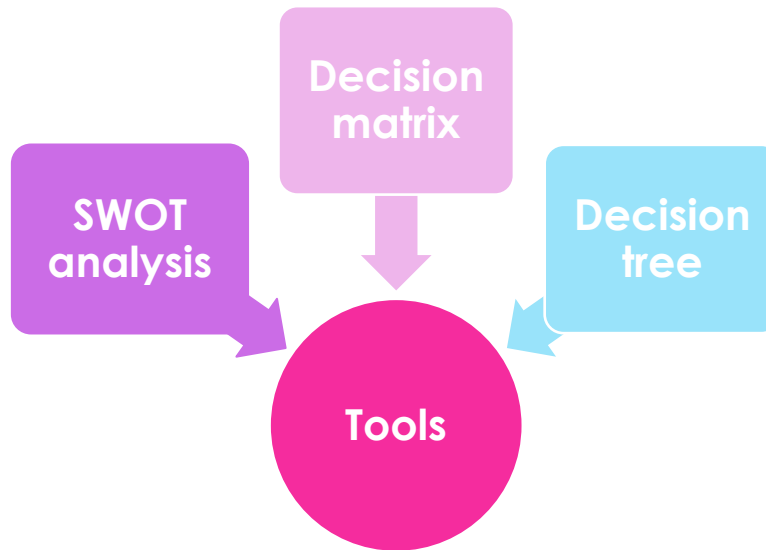
When you do your reality check you realize that options 1 & 4 will take too long to set up. You want to get your assistant promoting today. You've never tried option 3 so while it may work you decide not to chance it this time. You go with your alternative #2 as you've got stock to spare, can promote to existing and new customers right away, and this has worked for you in the past. You implement your decision and monitor the amount of income that's forthcoming over the next 4 weeks to see if you hit your target or not. If you did, then this could be a useful tactic to use in future when you have a bad month, but if it didn't then you'll need to try something else next time.

This is an example of using the 5-step process for an operational decision. However, if revenue is falling month to month, then you'll need a strategic decision as it will affect the direction of your business. You'll need to revisit your income generating strategy, check your sales targets, maybe even review your products and services and certify that you're meeting customer needs.

You can still use the 5-step process when you need to do strategic decision-making, but you'll spend more time over the steps and give more consideration to the pros and cons of the possibilities.

You could also use some decision-making tools to assist you. These tools help you to map out all the possible options to a complex decision and its potential cost and can give you an indication of success or failure.

Here's a selection of three popular tools:



- **SWOT analysis** that helps any organization assess its current situation based on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to your decision.
- **Decision matrix** that can help you get clarity when you're handling multiple choices and variables. It's similar to a pros and cons list, but it allows you to place a level of importance on each factor so that you can weigh the different options against each other.
- **Decision tree** which uses the layout of a tree, its branches, and leaves to provide a visual of possibilities and consequences of different decision options.

You might already use a tool to help you with your strategic decision-making. Visual depictions work well for people who like graphic representations. Getting your complex and confused thinking out of your head and onto paper helps many people start to see solutions and possibilities. It's fine if a simple pros and cons list works for you, but it's worth checking out some other tools that are available.

Whatever method you use, remember, there's no such thing as a 'bad' decision. There are decisions that turn out better than others, but it's always better to make some decision then evaluate the results than to make no decision at all. Your decisions aren't set in stone forever; they can always be refined later.

Does Intuition Play a Role?

When faced with a dilemma, some people will want to 'go with their gut' or 'get a feel for' the situation before making a decision.

Gut instinct, or intuition, is your immediate understanding of something. The sense of intuition is more developed in some people than others. Some people even decry it. However, it can't be dismissed that easily.

If you've ever been faced with a decision and you just knew what needed to happen and you didn't have to think it over or get another opinion, then you had an instinct about the situation.

Intuition is more than just a random feeling: it's the result of a lot of processing happening within the brain. The brain is constantly making decisions based on experiences from the past, current experiences, and incoming sensory information. All of this happens subconsciously. You don't realize it, but when you have a gut feeling about something, your brain has weighed all that information to bring you to a conclusion.

Intuition alone won't always lead to good decisions, especially if you want to break with the past in your thinking. Don't limit the possibility of innovating, but don't dismiss the gut feelings entirely. They can help you get an immediate grasp on a familiar situation without the need for conscious reasoning. Intuition can be useful if you have a quick decision to make and no time for more deliberate, analytical decision-making.

Action Steps:

1. Analyze any difficulties you have making decisions. Write down the reasons and what you could do to improve.
 - a. Review a decision you've made recently. Write down the steps you went through to reach your decision.
 - b. Note the outcome and how satisfied you were with it.
 - c. What process did you use to come to your decision? What was the outcome?
 - d. What could you have done differently?
2. Choose a current operational situation you're having trouble making a decision on, or a decision you have to make soon. Complete the separate **5-Step Decision Making Process Worksheet** to help you plan.

Module 3 – The Delegation & Accountability Blueprint

Why Delegate?

Learning how to delegate is one of the most important skills to master as CEO. Accepting that you can't do everything yourself can be challenging, but it's essential if you want to have a successful, growing business.

Delegation will enable you to free up time to focus on your CEO role without drowning under the weight of day-to-day tasks. There are probably many activities eating into your available time which simply shouldn't be done by you at all. But it isn't just tasks to think about. Delegate day-to-day decisions to free you up to focus on the strategic ones that you, as CEO, need to make.

The most famous entrepreneurs and business people are focused on what they're doing. Focus goes hand-in-hand with delegation. When you can delegate minor tasks to others, you're able to narrow your focus on your high-level goals.

What Prevents Delegation?

If you've built your business by yourself and have done all the tasks needed to get it where it is today, you may find it difficult to start delegating some of those tasks to others.

Many entrepreneurs don't delegate what they need to early enough in their businesses.

There can be many reasons for this which you may recognize as being true for you, for example:

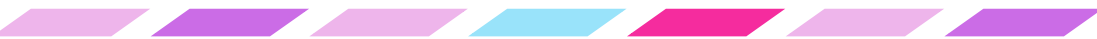
It's your baby and you're afraid of losing control



You want to show that you can do anything that you would ask team members to do



You feel more secure and comfortable doing something which you know you can do well rather than fully taking on your CEO role



You believe it's quicker and easier to do the job yourself, rather than leave it to somebody who can't do it as well as you can



You have no choice but to do it yourself because you don't have enough people to do the job for you



You can't afford to pay someone else to do something you can do yourself



You don't know how to hold people accountable to do it for you



- It's your baby and you're afraid of losing control
- You want to show that you can do anything that you would ask team members to do
- You feel more secure and comfortable doing something which you know you can do well rather than fully taking on your CEO role

- You believe it's quicker and easier to do the job yourself, rather than leave it to somebody who can't do it as well as you can
- You have no choice but to do it yourself because you don't have enough people to do the job for you
- You can't afford to pay someone else to do something you can do yourself
- You don't know how to hold people accountable to do it for you

These are all common reasons so if you feel like this, don't worry. However, you may not realize that relinquishing control over the little things helps you to be more effective at the strategic elements of your business. You may think you can't afford to delegate for a whole host of reasons. The truth is that you can't afford *not* to delegate.

Start identifying what prevents you from delegating, and you'll begin to sort out the fact from the fantasy and see what's possible.

Identify Tasks to Delegate

By delegating effectively, you will free up your capacity to work on other, more important aspects of your business.

By leveraging the skills and availability of others, you can focus on the more interesting jobs in your business which needs a strategic steer from the CEO. These may be the things you wanted to focus on in the first place.

But you can't think about using others until you know what it is you're doing yourself.

Take some time to make a list of your daily tasks and note down roughly how much time you spend on them. Focus especially on things that take up your time or that you're not equipped to deal with. For example, if you spend a good part of the day redesigning your website but you aren't a website designer, then you aren't using your time judiciously.

Review your list and ask yourself these questions:

What am I doing that need not be done at all? What tasks do I engage in that aren't essential and consume a lot of time?

Which of my activities could be done by somebody else just as well, if not better?

Where do I have gaps in my skills or knowledge that could be helped by outsourcing to an expert?

- What am I doing that need not be done at all? What tasks do I engage in that aren't essential and consume a lot of time?
- Which of my activities could be done by somebody else just as well, if not better?
- Where do I have gaps in my skills or knowledge that could be helped by outsourcing to an expert?

If you identify tasks that don't need to be done at all, then eliminate them.

Identify Delegation Options

Before you rush off to recruit new people, have a look at your list of daily tasks again and see which tasks need a person and which can be done by an online system.

1. Choose the right system

There are many software tools available to automate routine tasks and processes. Once the system is set up, neither you nor anyone in your team needs to take up time with them.

Think about what technology might help make your job and those of others in your team more efficient.

For example you can use:

- scheduling tools such as [ScheduleOnce](#) or [Calendly](#) so customers can book appointments with you online
- email marketing tool such as [Keap](#) or [MailerLite](#) so you can pre-schedule appropriate email communications for new leads and customers
- task project managements tool like [Asana](#) or [Trello](#) to help you keep track of projects and progress
- company knowledge sharing tools like [Whale.io](#) or [Trainual](#) to automate new hire onboarding and employee trainings
- team communication tools such as Slack or Monday to keep your team connected, informed, and productive

Find tasks that you can get off your to-do list through automation. The example would be voice recognition software to save you time creating documents. There are many good examples shared in this guide but you may need to do some research if you think of others that would be useful to you and your business.

2. Choose the right person

Of course, there will be some tasks that can't be automated, but you don't have to do them yourself. Consider asking someone else to handle tasks that are bogging you down and which don't relate directly to your CEO role. Even if you don't have regular team members, you can easily find the right person to outsource to.

Nowadays, small businesses often don't hire full-time employees and there are more and more great people with fantastic skills who choose not to be in full-time employment. Put the two together and you have a pool of talent you can fish in to select suitable, experienced people to take on specific short-term projects for you, or to work regularly in your business for a few hours a week. The permutations are endless and once you decide who you want and for what purpose, you'll be able to find them.

You're probably already outsourcing. Most entrepreneurs will outsource to an accountant or bookkeeper because they know that you need a specific set of skills for that. However, they might choose to do the advertising, marketing, selling, website design, planning, writing articles, and so on themselves. These too demand a specific skill set which you don't necessarily have.

And we're not just talking about your business here. If you need someone to pick up your kids or clean your home so that you can concentrate on working your CEO role, then look for them.

Many people set up their business on a shoestring, finding as many ways as possible to do something for no cost/low cost, and the lowest cost they see is themselves.

Cost is often the major reason we don't find someone to help us, especially in the early days. But this can be a false economy. If any of the jobs you do in your business could be done by someone else for a cheaper hourly rate than yours, then you're not working smart. You're losing money from your business.

Once you find the right person to do the job, use the 5-step delegation process to get the outcomes you want.

The 5-Step Delegation Process

Successful delegation involves giving a task to someone else and ensuring that they know what's expected and when it's expected. Delegation is not the dumping of an unwanted task with no instruction.

When you delegate, you give responsibility to someone else to enable them to complete the task. But you still remain accountable, so you aren't giving up control.

Here's a step-by-step process to help you delegate your day-to-day tasks and decisions so that you free up time to focus on strategic business growth:



Step 1 - Identify the need

Describe the task or procedure so you are absolutely clear on what you're asking someone else to do.

Set your specific standards and expectations for the work. For example, don't say, "I want this report written well" but be specific about how you want it laid out, grammar and spelling, and so on. You may even give the person a report that has already been written to your standards as a model.

Decide the checks so you'll know things are progressing successfully. For example, for complex tasks you might decide to talk to the person once they've started to check they're on track.

Step 2 - Identify the person

Choose the right person who has the skills needed. For example, consider existing abilities, level of interest and motivation, time availability, and

previous relevant training or experience. Pick the criteria that are relevant to your task and appropriate to its complexity.

Step 3 - Create a delegation plan with the person

Use the **5-Step Delegation Process Worksheet** to guide you:

- Put the task into context and explain why it's important. Delegate whole tasks, not parts of them, to make it motivating and developmental for the other person.
- Specify the outcome you're looking for by explaining the results you want to see.
- Agree on the level of support needed and when you'll review progress. Plan for interim reviews on complex tasks or with new people so you'll know if the task is going off the rails.

Step 4 – Ask the person to implement the plan

You stand by to support if needed. You might need to plan time into your schedule for this in advance.

Step 5 – Get feedback and evaluate

When the task is completed, give feedback to the person on how they did. Don't forget to thank them too, as this is a reward that costs you nothing. Evaluate the outcome to identify if this was the best person suited to the task. Check that you were able to relinquish control while still maintaining ultimate responsibility.

At the end of this module, you'll choose a task to delegate and follow the delegation process, using the **5-Step Delegation Process Worksheet**.

How Delegation Goes Wrong

Maybe you tried delegating in the past and it didn't work out well. Don't let this put you off. It could be that your delegation skills weren't very advanced at that stage.

Delegation can miss the mark if:

You don't know the strengths and limitations of your people well enough

You aren't clear and specific about the outcome you expect

You give up accountability and make them totally responsible

You delegate in an unfair way and always choose the same person on your team

You don't make the necessary resources available for them to do the task

You're not available for the agreed upon support

You micro-manage and don't let the person get on with the task

- You don't know the strengths and limitations of your people well enough
- You aren't clear and specific about the outcome you expect

- You give up accountability and make them totally responsible
- You delegate in an unfair way and always choose the same person in your team
- You don't make the necessary resources available for them to do the task
- You're not available for the agreed upon support
- You micro-manage and don't let the person get on with the task

Follow the 5-step delegation process and you'll avoid these pitfalls.

Action Steps:

1. Write down what gets in your way of delegating, for example what your fears and fantasies are.
2. Make a list of daily tasks and how much time you spend on them. Note especially tasks that take up time or that you're not equipped to deal with. Ask yourself these questions:
 - a. What am I doing that need not be done at all? What tasks do I engage in that aren't essential and consume a lot of time?
 - b. Which of my activities could be done by somebody else just as well, if not better?
 - c. Where do I have gaps in my skills or knowledge that could be helped by outsourcing to an expert?
3. Review the list again:
 - a. Identify tasks that can be automated. Plan to find the tools and set up the systems.
4. Identify tasks to outsource. Plan how you'll do this. Choose a task to delegate and follow the delegation process. Use the **5-Step Delegation Process Worksheet** to guide you.

Module 4 – The Creativity & Innovation Blueprint

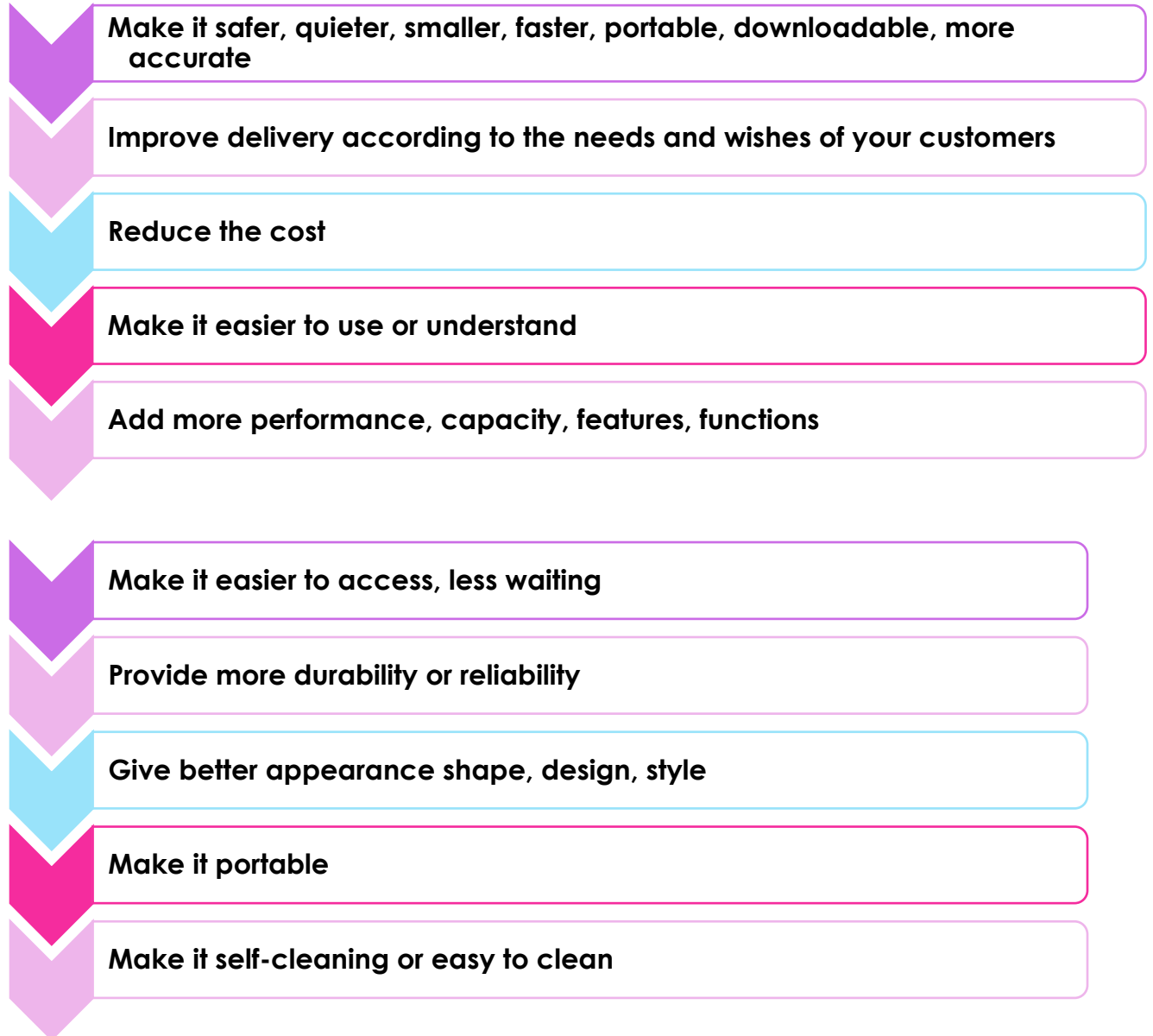
What Is Innovation?

Innovation is about discovering, integrating, seeing in new ways, finding connections, and then using that insight to create something that you and others find useful and valuable.

Innovation is often thought of as the act of creating something new, but it doesn't need to be new, just better. It's the lifeblood of businesses that want to move forward and deal proactively with change.

But this isn't innovation for the sake of innovation. Innovation means enhancing the performance of a process, person, team, or organization. For small businesses, continuous and appropriate innovation means they keep the competitive edge.

There are many ways a business can innovate and bring about improvements in their products and services. Here are some examples:



- **Make it safer, quieter, smaller, faster, portable, downloadable, more accurate**
- **Find ways to improve the delivery of your product or service according to the needs and wishes of your customers**

- Reduce the cost
- Make it easier to use or understand
- Add more performance, capacity, features, functions
- Make it easier to access, less waiting
- Provide more durability or reliability
- Give better appearance shape, design, style
- Make it portable
- Make it self-cleaning or easy to clean

Choose to Innovate

What have you logged in a corner of your mind that you need to improve in your business? It might be a change that customers have been asking for, or a glitch in your systems that's no longer saving you the time it should. There may be increased threats from your competition, or you simply want to offer more value to your customers.

Make a list of any improvements you've been meaning to make or have been asked to make. Think about all aspects of your business, both customer-facing and backroom. There could be a small area where you could make an improvement which would streamline a communication system and save time. Or you could find a more engaging way to keep in touch with existing customers. Remember, innovation can be enhancement rather than complete change or radical rethink.

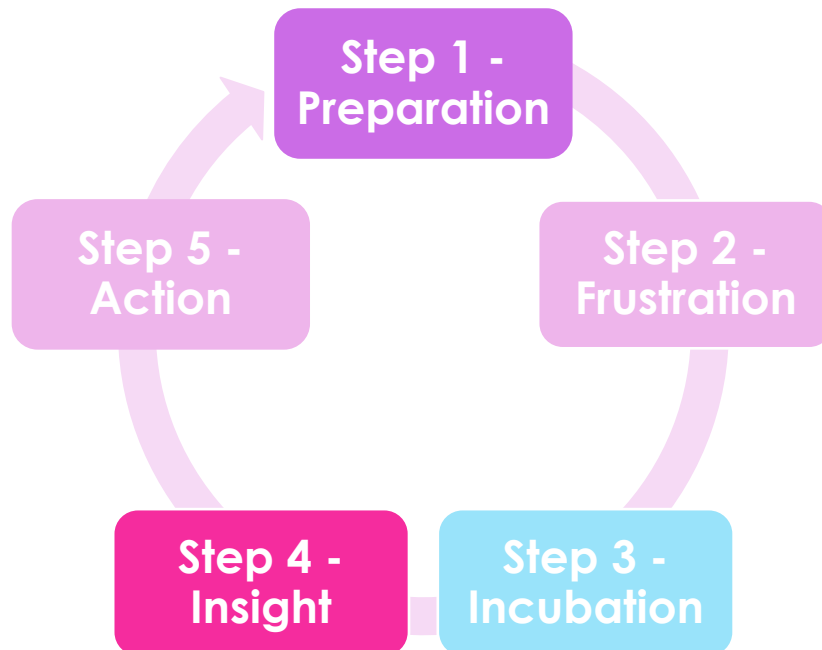
The Creative Process

Innovation isn't something that just happens. It stems from creative thinking, so you need to stimulate creativity before you can innovate. You may have come up with some new ideas when completing the last exercise. That's because you have stimulated your creative process. If you didn't, then don't worry. Creativity is a mix of skill and attitude and you can develop it.

Creativity is present in everyone, and when you enable systems and practices that support innovation, you can tap into this. A CEO promotes innovation in their business when they bring together and manage creative ideas. But you need to have creative thinking first.

The 5-Step Creative Process

Being creative isn't about forcing that 'light bulb moment'. A lot more is going on in the brain and this lays itself out in a recognized process.



Step 1 - Preparation

Analyze the task, gather data, look for patterns, try out ideas, question assumptions.

In the first step, you gather materials and conduct research that could spark an interesting idea. Brainstorm and let your mind wander or write in a journal to foster divergent thinking. This will help you consider all possible approaches to building out your idea. In this first part of the process, your brain is using its memory bank to draw on knowledge and past experiences to generate original ideas.

Step 2 - Frustration

When habitual ways of thinking about the problem break down, creativity is possible.

Once you have an idea of where you want to innovate, it's easy to experience frustration that you can't find the solution immediately or can't see the way forward. In fact, this feeling of frustration indicates precisely the opposite. It's a signal that your typical ways of thinking about the problem are breaking down and that creativity is becoming possible.

To be creative, you need to go beyond your current beliefs and mindsets to explore new territories and to bring what is outside of your consciousness into awareness. However, the rational mind wants to stay with what it knows and tries to hold us back from moving into the unknown. This feeling of frustration is actually the feeling of your conscious mind recognizing that it doesn't have the answer yet.

Step 3 - Incubation

Give up trying and hand over to your subconscious mind.

Now it's time to give up striving, put your conscious problem-solving on hold, and hand over to your subconscious mind. The brain will go on working on your behalf in the background to find an answer to the problem you've set it. Let it get on with its job and go do something else.

You give your conscious mind a rest when you sleep on the problem, so do something mundane like laundry or ironing, stare out of the window, go for a run, or simply get on with another task that needs to be done in your business.

Step 4 - Insight

This is the 'ah ha moment'.

Having done all the groundwork, wait for the moment of insight when something shifts and you give birth to a new idea, see things in a new way, or create new possibilities. While the insight often appears to have come from nowhere, it actually occurs as a result of everything that has happened in the steps prior.

Step 5 - Action

Turn insight into reality.

To have an insight is one thing, to act on it and turn it into reality is your last step. This involves testing your insights and using your decision-making skills to take the idea and turn it into an improvement in your business. Keep your creative mind open to finding solutions.

You might recognize these stages operating in your own life. You may have had the experience of struggling to find an answer to a problem and then in frustration, put it aside and gone off to do something else. Then, almost by magic, the solution popped up in your mind. That was the creative process in action.

At the end of this module, you'll try out the creative process by choosing one of the improvements you noted earlier. Don't pick the most complex one to start with. It could even be a non-business example, such as how to find ways to get your kids to clear up their rooms.

Then, apply the 5-step creative process to it and note the results. You can't force this, so take the time you need to follow through the steps. Be curious about the process and let it unfold.

How to Inspire Your Own Creativity

As CEO, you are the leader in creativity for the people you work with, so let's start with you. Are you a creative thinker?

Most people don't consider themselves to be creative. Creativity is seen as external, the realm of the artist, the composer, the inventor, and not the activity of the small business owner/CEO.

You may not be as famous as Mozart, Pythagoras, Shakespeare, Archimedes, or Einstein, but you are no less creative. In fact, you're creating with every thought and word you speak, and the more you value and acknowledge your own creativity, the more creative you allow yourself to be.

As we said before, creativity can be learned and there are many ways to develop your way of looking, thinking, living, seeing, and being.

Here are a couple of quick exercises you could do on a weekly basis to stimulate your subconscious mind and develop your creativity.

Exercise 1: New Uses

Choose an everyday object and think of at least 25 original uses for it. For example, a paperclip, a coffee cup, a cardboard box, a towel.

Don't list the purpose that the item is already used for but challenge your brain to find fanciful new uses that have some element of practicality in them. Write a sentence about each new use.

Exercise 2: Improvements

Focus on altering an item to enhance its original purpose. Pick something common that most people would never think of changing. The classic textbook example item is the coffee cup.

Improvements suggested have included things like:

- Multiple handles
- Anti-spill
- Built-in heater
- Wheels
- Tea bag holder on side
- Self-brewing
- Self-cleaning

Choose your item and think of at least 10 practical ways it can be improved.

Either of these two exercises can be done quickly in a brainstorming session with yourself. Set 10 minutes on the clock and try one now. The more you

do these types of exercises, the more you'll open up the path to your creative brain, and innovation will be easier.

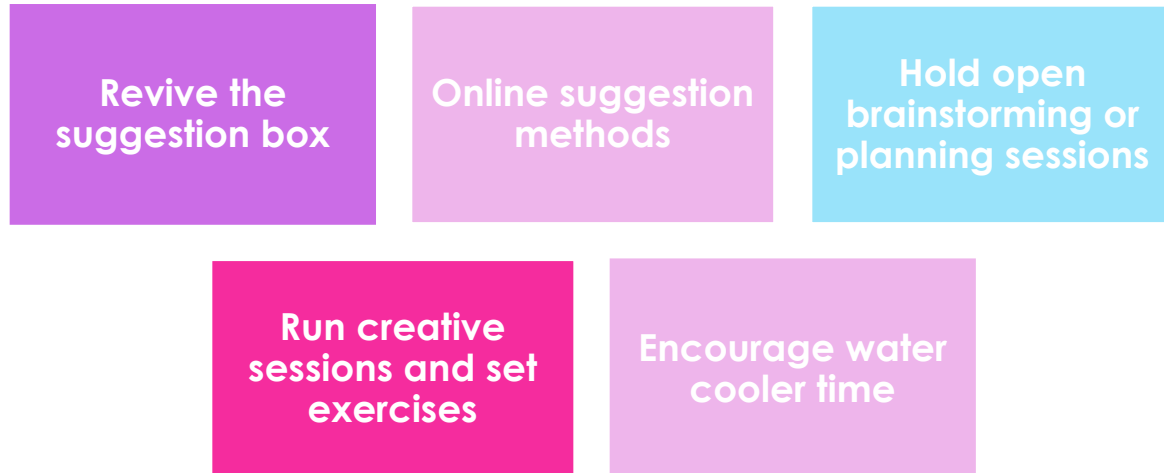
Creativity needs energy. Make sure you keep your energy levels up by taking regular breaks during the day. If you're working on a complex project, break up your day into chunks. For example, set 90 minutes on the clock and then do something physical for 5 minutes like walking, stretching, singing, or whatever works to re-energize your system. This will help you stay tuned in to your creativity and help the brain in idea generation.

How to Build a Creative Culture

Your business is not just you, so it makes sense to think about how you can stimulate new ways of thinking within the business, in your team, or with the people who work for you. This will result in a group who can come up with fresh and original ideas to innovate around business problems.

Think of your 'team' in its widest sense. It can include freelancers you regularly outsource to as well as your salaried employees if you have them. If you have developed a relationship with a community on social media, they could also contribute ideas, as could past and current customers if appropriate.

Here are some ideas for ways to encourage creativity from others and generate ideas:



- Revive the suggestion box. It's a traditional way of encouraging participation and can be made available to both team members and customers. Make sure you have a mechanism in place for responding to suggestions so that people don't feel ignored.
- Rather than having a physical suggestion box, you can use online methods. For example, ask your team members to submit ideas via an online portal such as [Asana](#), [Trello](#), etc.
- Another good way to get suggestions from people is to hold open brainstorming or planning sessions. These are great for bonding and team-building, and they can also bring up unexpected and off-the-wall ideas. Just make sure you drop all your preconceptions beforehand.
- Run creative sessions and set exercises like the 10-minute ones above. You could even turn the sessions into a competition to make it more fun and dynamic.
- Encourage water cooler time. Short periods of down time help people to switch off their brains and stimulate subconscious thinking by disengaging from work topics. If you have a global team, then think about organizing virtual water cooler conversations at set times when people get together on [Zoom](#) or [Skype](#). You could have a virtual happy

hour or a virtual book club or whatever might help to bring your team together.

The first thing you can do to create a culture of innovation is to lead by example. This means organizing a brainstorming session with everyone when you're thinking about launching a new product or using creative tools in your meetings such as mind mapping so that you model creativity.

Action Steps:

1. Make a list of any improvements you've been meaning to make or asked to make in your business.
 - a. Choose one of the areas for innovation you noted and apply the 5-step creative process to it and note your progress. Use the separate **5-Step Creative Process Worksheet** to guide you.
2. Stimulate your creativity as CEO by doing these exercises:
 - a. Exercise 1: New uses
 - b. Exercise 2: Improvements
 - c. Note how it felt doing the exercises.
3. Identify two ways you could inspire creativity in others and create a culture of innovation.

Module 5 – Wrap Up & Integration

You've made it to the end of the course, so now it's time to reflect on what you've achieved and plan what's next.

Get Support

It can be isolating to find yourself running a business as CEO. Everyone needs support and it's unfair to depend on your family all the time for it.

Connect with peers who are at a similar place in their business as you. You might find them through networking events, social media groups, or LinkedIn connections. Set up regular conversations where you can swap challenges and brainstorm solutions to help each other. You might decide to join a coaching or mastermind group where a small number of business owners come together to learn and support each other.

Decision-Making in Groups

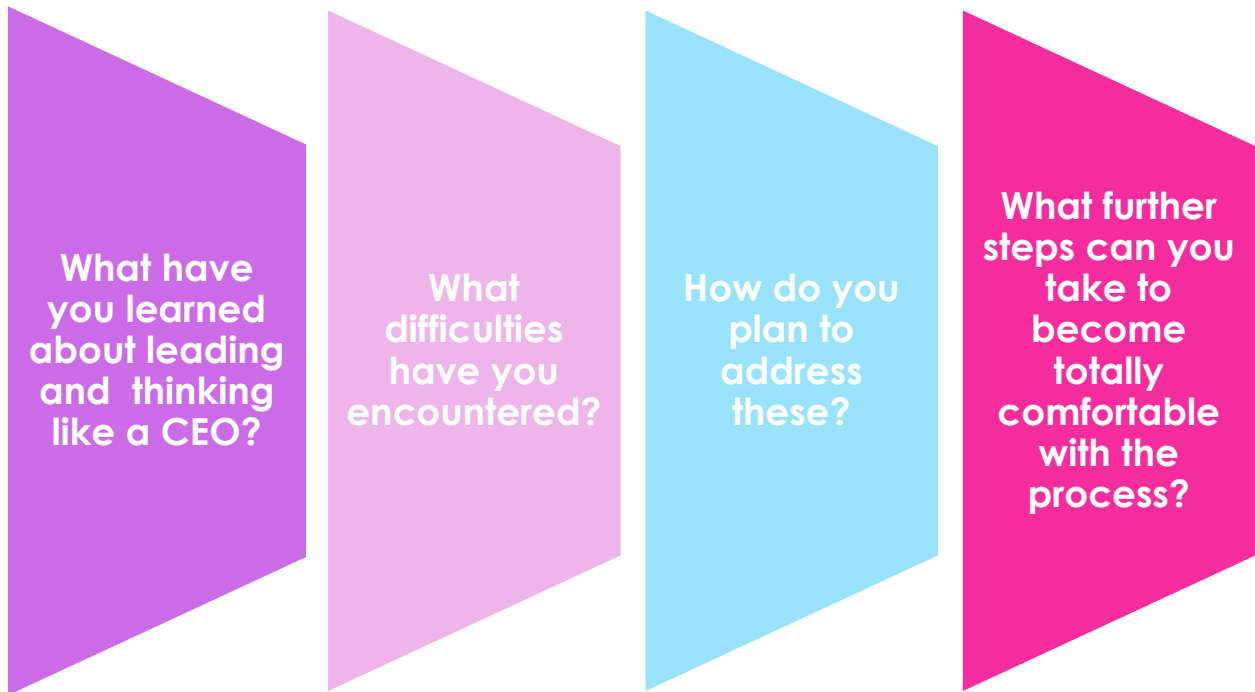
In the course, we've looked particularly at decision-making by you as CEO. When you have a team working for you, there will be times you'll want to involve them in the decision-making process. You can follow the same 5-step process as before, but you'll need to allow extra time to hear the ideas and opinions of your team. Make it clear from the beginning whether this is a collective decision or one you'll make yourself based on their involvement. Don't ask for people's input if you have no intention of taking it into account, as that's very demotivating.

Future Delegation

When you hire new people, take time to find out their strengths. This applies especially to regular team members, as they may have skills and talents beyond their current role. If you have a few freelancers who work regularly for you too, make sure you know what they're particularly good at. When you're clear on the talent pool you can draw upon, you can more accurately pick the right person to delegate to. This will help achieve your objectives quicker.

What You Learned

This is a course you can refer back to time and time again to remind you of how you can develop processes to use as CEO that will keep your business moving forward. It's important to reflect on what you've learned, so answer these questions and complete the action plan in your Action Guide:



- What have you learned about leading and behaving like a CEO?
- What difficulties have you encountered?
- How do you plan to address these?
- What further steps can you take to become totally comfortable with the process?

Action Steps:

1. Make a decision on where to look for support in your role as CEO, for example peer support or coaching.
2. Review the course thoroughly and answer the questions on what you've learned in your Action Guide.
3. Use the action plan in the Action Guide to record your goals and what needs to happen next.