

MSME OWNER'S PLAYBOOK · BONUS 13

The System Audit

Find out what's actually running on systems — and what's just running on you.

WORTH ₹499 — YOURS FREE

For every founder who came back from a few days away to find out how much of the business only runs when they're personally watching it.



THE PROBLEM

Five Days Away. 340 Messages. Two Fires. One Wrong Invoice.

Rohan runs a 22-person logistics coordination business. Last month he took his first proper break in two years — five days, phone mostly off. He came back to 340 unread WhatsApp messages, two client escalations nobody had resolved, and an invoice that had gone out with the wrong GST number, for the third time this quarter.

You've heard a version of this from people you know — the friend whose office "runs like clockwork" until they leave the building, the cousin whose team calls them mid-holiday because nobody else knows how to handle a routine issue that comes up every single month.

This isn't a team problem. Rohan's team is capable. What's missing isn't effort — it's systems that work whether or not he's personally in the room to make them work.



WHY THIS HAPPENS — AND WHO'S REALLY RESPONSIBLE

"I Handled It" Isn't the Same as "There's a System for It."

This one is entirely on the founder — not as a criticism, but as the simplest explanation available. Every time something breaks and you personally step in to fix it, the business learns exactly one lesson: this depends on you. Nobody else is going to interrupt that pattern for you.

Three reasons real systems rarely get built in businesses like yours:

Processes get built reactively. Something breaks, you bolt on a fix, and move on to the next fire — nothing gets documented in the moment.

"Everyone knows how it works" — until you ask someone to explain it without you in the room, and the gaps suddenly appear.

Nobody's ever tested what happens without you — a system you've never stress-tested isn't a system. It's an assumption.



ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

Let's Actually Get to the Root of It

Run the "5 Whys" on Rohan's five-day disaster — the same drill-down worth running on your own last "it fell apart while I was away" moment:

THE SYMPTOM	<i>"The business fell apart the moment I stepped away for five days."</i> ! Why?
WHY #1	Several critical tasks — invoicing checks, escalation handling — only happened because I personally checked on them. ! Why?
WHY #2	There was no written process anyone else could actually follow for those tasks. ! Why?
WHY #3	We'd never tested whether the business could run a single day without me, let alone five. ! Why?
THE ROOT	We've never distinguished between "things that happen because I do them" and "things that happen because there's a system for them" — so almost everything quietly depends on my presence.

Run this on your own last fire that flared up in your absence. The root is rarely "the team dropped the ball." It's almost always that there was never really a system to hold onto in the first place.



LIKELY SOLUTIONS — AND WHAT EACH ONE ACTUALLY GETS YOU

Four Ways Owners Try to Fix This

A

Hire a General Manager to "Take Over"

What you get: Someone else accountable for the day-to-day.

What it costs you: A senior salary — and if there's no documented system, they just rebuild the same tribal knowledge, equally dependent on their own presence.

B

Buy Expensive Software to "Systemize Everything"

What you get: Dashboards, a sense of modernisation.

What it costs you: Software without a defined process just digitizes the chaos faster — garbage in, garbage out.

C

Write One Giant SOP Manual for Everything at Once

What you get: The feeling of being thorough.

What it costs you: Months of work that goes stale before it's finished — and nobody reads a 200-page document anyway.

D

Audit and Build Systems One Critical Area at a Time

What you get: Real, tested processes that survive your absence — built in weeks, not months.

What it costs you: The discipline to finish one system before starting the next one.

THE RIGHT DEFAULT BEFORE YOUR NEXT VACATION



THE RECOMMENDED PATH — STEP BY STEP

Run Your Own Audit This Week

- 01 List every task that broke or nearly broke last month**
While you were away, distracted, or just not personally checking. Be specific — vague memories hide the pattern.
- 02 For each one, ask: "could someone else have done this without calling me?"**
An honest no is your most valuable data point in this entire exercise.
- 03 Pick the single highest-risk "no" and document it first**
Not the easiest one — the one that would hurt most if it broke again next month.
- 04 Test it by stepping away — a day, not a vacation**
See if it actually holds before you trust it with something bigger.
- 05 Fix what breaks, then move to the next area**
One system, properly tested, beats five systems that only exist on paper.



HOW TO AVOID THIS GOING FORWARD

Make It a Habit, Not a Hope

Systems decay quietly the moment nobody's maintaining them. Build these habits in permanently.

- **Never let "I'll just handle it" become permanent.** The third time you personally handle something, write it down as a process instead.
- **Run a quarterly "systems fire drill."** Plan to be unreachable for a day, on purpose, and see what actually breaks.
- **Assign one system owner per area** — not just users. Someone accountable for keeping it updated, not just following it.
- **Revisit every system once a year.** A stale system is just a suggestion nobody follows anymore.

A business that runs without you in the room isn't a business that needs you less. It's a business that finally has room to grow.



THE SIMPLEWORKS FRAMEWORK — PART 1

The 5-Point System Test

Run this on every critical task in your business. If any answer is no, it isn't a system — it's a habit that depends on you.

1

Written

Is it documented somewhere real — not just in someone's head, including yours?

2

Repeatable

Could someone trained on it follow the same steps and get the same result, reliably?

3

Owned

Is there one named person accountable for it running — and for keeping it updated?

4

Tested

Has it actually run without you personally watching over it, even once?

5

Measured

Do you actually know if it's working — or are you just assuming it is because nothing's exploded yet?

Score every critical area of your business against these five. The gaps you find are your actual to-do list — not the one in your head.



THE SIMPLEWORKS FRAMEWORK — PART 2

The 4-Step System Builder

Use this for any area where the 5-Point Test just failed — and no system exists yet at all.

1

Capture

Write down how it's actually done today — even if it's messy, even if it only lives in one person's head. Capture reality, not the idealised version.

2

Simplify

Cut it down to the fewest steps that still work. Remove anything that only exists because "that's how it's always been done."

3

Assign

Give it one owner and one trained backup. A system with no owner quietly decays within a quarter.

4

Test

Hand it to someone else and step back completely. Whatever breaks tells you exactly what to fix next — that's not failure, that's the process working.

Capture, Simplify, Assign, Test. Repeat this on one area at a time, and in a year you'll have a business built on systems instead of on memory.



ABOUT SIMPLEWORKS

One Consultant. Four Connected Disciplines.

Simpleworks Consulting is a boutique advisory practice built for Indian MSME owners — founded by **Prem Menon**, drawing on 39 years across Consumer Durables, Tyres, Telecom, and IT/SaaS. The philosophy is simple: strip away complexity, and give founders tools sophisticated enough to work — and simple enough to run without a large team.

Every Simpleworks engagement draws on four connected practice areas, because strategy, go-to-market, execution, and measurement are rarely separate problems in a real business.

01 Business Strategy

The smallest set of choices that makes every later decision easier — where to play, and how to win.

02 Go-to-Market

Turning the strategic choice into revenue — the right segment, message, channel, and price, working as one coherent system.

03 Execution Enablement

The operating rhythm — meetings, decisions, ownership — that converts intent into outcome.

04 OKRs

The feedback loop that tells you honestly whether the strategy is working, and holds the system accountable.

Four lenses on the same question: how does your business get from where it is, to where you've decided it should be?



LET'S TALK

You've Seen the Problem. Let's Build the Systems That Hold.

If this booklet described what happened the last time you stepped away, that's usually the first sign it's worth a real conversation — before the next trip, not after it goes sideways.

Reach out. No pitch, no jargon — just a straight conversation about your business, your growth, or whatever's keeping you up tonight.

Prem Menon

Founder, Simpleworks Consulting

- pm@simpleworks.in
- +91 90360 99000
- www.simpleworks.in