

What type of owner manager are you?

An owner managed business looks and feels the way that it does today, and has the opportunities and challenges it has today, because it belongs to that individual. The future growth prospects of that business are also primarily driven by the owner manager – their drive, their ambition, and the way they manage and lead the business.

In particular, as a business grows and develops, the way in which it is managed and led also needs to change.

Of course, all owner managers have many different leadership attributes. At the start, you need the drive and energy to get the business off the ground. As the business moves on, sometimes you need to be the visionary leader who inspires others, sometimes there are crises you have to manage and fires you need to fight, sometimes you need to put systems and processes in place and ensure that they work effectively - and sometimes you just need to get your hands dirty and get the job done.

All of these leadership attributes are important and valuable at different times. In fact, at different stages in the life of a business, an owner manager will need to adopt different leadership approaches in order for the business to grow and develop. At the same time, if an owner manager struggles to move from one leadership approach to another, this may result in the growth and development of the business being constrained.

The following simple questionnaire will help you understand the leadership approach you usually adopt currently - provided that you answer the questions honestly! By understanding your current leadership approach, you'll be in a better position to understand the impact that you have on the business and the nature of the transition you need to make in order to achieve your ambitions.

There are no right and wrong approaches – indeed, your leadership approach is often a function of the stage of development of your business. So, there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions.

There's also very limited value to you in pretending to be something that you're not or trying to answer the questions to reflect how you think you *should* be. To get the most possible value out of the questionnaire, **answer the questions honestly based on what you currently do and the way you currently spend your time.**



Four different leadership approaches are identified by the questionnaire. These four approaches were originally described by Colin Barrow and Liz Clarke and the descriptions have been published several times including in *“Growing Your Business: a Handbook for Ambitious Owner Managers”* by Gerard Burke et al (Routledge, 2008). This questionnaire, and the descriptions of the approaches provided later, is based on that original work and is a significant development of it.

Directions for completing the questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 40 questions. For each question, indicate the extent to which the statement describes accurately your current approach to leadership, what you currently do or the way you currently spend your time. Indicate the accuracy of each statement in describing you on a scale of 0 to 3 where

- 0 = The statement does not describe me at all
- 1 = The statement describes me some of the time
- 2 = The statement describes me most of the time
- 3 = The statement me nearly all of the time.

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The questionnaire

Question	Statement	Score
1	The best way to grow my business is to have more staff who can do what I do.	
2	My main role is to keep my finger on the pulse and ensure nothing goes wrong.	
3	I spend time during every working week thinking about the future of my business.	
4	I'm the best person in the business at sorting out problems.	
5	I'm always telling staff about ways they can improve what they do.	
6	I invest time and money in developing my management team.	
7	I enjoy rolling my sleeves up and getting stuck in.	
8	The best way to get things done is to do them myself.	
9	I communicate through downward briefings from me to my staff.	
10	I spend very little time on day-to-day management tasks.	
11	I spend most of my time 'fire-fighting' and dealing with operational tasks.	
12	I know the best way to do things and I get irritated when I see other people doing things differently.	
13	I communicate by setting the vision of where we're going rather than worrying about how we'll get there.	
14	I'm the only one who can make the important decisions around here.	
15	I see myself as very much 'one of the gang'.	
16	I spend most of my time on routine management tasks, particularly checking that things get done the way I want them to be done.	
17	My primary internal role is to support and enable my management team to drive the business.	
18	Everyone knows that I'm the boss.	

19	People think that I interfere too much.	
20	I spend most of my time doing the core activity of the business.	
21	I don't believe it's possible to plan for the long-term in this business.	
22	I spend most of my time either working on the future of the business or motivating and developing my managers.	
23	I prefer 1-to-1 communication as a way of keeping in touch with what's happening in the business.	
24	I live and breathe our products and services.	
25	I believe in 'leading from the front'.	
26	I often make 'heroes' of other people.	
27	I need to step in personally to deal with dissatisfied customers.	
28	My skills come to the fore in times of crisis.	
29	I take pride from personally producing a quality product/service.	
30	I have so much detail to manage that there's no time to think about the future.	
31	I take pride when people say: 'We did it ourselves'.	
32	I don't really have a management team - it's down to me.	
33	I prefer informal communications on an ad hoc basis.	
34	I spend a lot of my time introducing and fine-tuning management systems and processes.	
35	I focus on creating a different and better future for the business.	
36	Mostly, I'm busy 'getting the job done' rather than managing the business.	
37	Customers and other external stakeholders want to talk to me rather than any of my staff.	
38	I have a management team but I'm not sure how effective they are.	
39	I trust my management team to run the business day-to-day.	
40	We're too busy doing the work to take time to think about the future.	

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Scoring the questionnaire

Insert your score for each question into the unshaded box on the row that corresponds to that question. Then total your scores in each column. The minimum total score in each column is 0 and the maximum is 30.

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Total				

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Interpreting your score

Each of the four columns of the scoring table corresponds to one of the four owner manager leadership approaches. Your highest total scores indicate your current preferred leadership approach.

Any score of 20 or above indicates a very strong tendency towards that approach. Any score of less than 10 indicates a very low tendency towards that approach.

The four approaches are described below.

Artisan beginnings

Most businesses have 'artisan' beginnings. The founder has some skill or knowledge for which other people or businesses will pay. He/she is an 'expert' in that core activity on which the business is based – designers who design, engineers who engineer, solicitors who solicit. Some businesses remain like this for many years.

The Artisan typically spends most of his/her time producing the core product or service of the business. The level of business/management skills in the business is also typically quite low as most of the Artisan's staff are employed helping in production or carrying out primary tasks such as accounts or sales. The owner manager is still very much "*one of the boys*". Artisans can encompass professional firms such as architects and surveyors, manufacturers, sub-contractors or small building firms, owners of small retail chains such as chemists, video stores, and proprietors of hotels and restaurants. The Artisan has low growth prospects relative to the market.

Heroic tendencies

Because the founder is very skilled at the core activity, they make lots of sales and so recruit more people to help deliver the work. Inevitably, the owner manager now spends time on management tasks – invoicing, collecting money, and keeping the other staff happy. The owner manager is probably still the most skilled in the core activity, and they almost certainly still own the key customer relationships. Naturally, the customers only want to speak to the owner manager and the staff bring the owner manager their problems. The owner manager has become a Hero.

Time is now spent on managing the business. As the level of management skill is still relatively low, the owner manager will take the lead in initiating routine management procedures. Typically, the owner manager will read up or attend one-off events on ideas such as accounting, business ratios, market segmentation, sales management and staff appraisal systems. The owner manager will introduce these ideas to the firm, and be the only person who really understands them. Hence the perception of the owner manager as the Hero is exacerbated.

The Hero has a high capacity for improving the performance of the business and still has low growth prospects relative to the market. There is no time for strategic thinking and no depth of management to handle growth effectively.

Of course, being a hero is good for the ego. At the same time, if all decisions and issues can only be handled by the owner manager, growth of the business is constrained by the number of hours that the owner manager works!

Sharing the load – and meddling

Most Heroes recognise they should involve other people in management tasks so they recruit or promote. These new managers don't necessarily do things in the same way as the founder did – which, for many owner managers, means that the new managers are doing things wrong! The owner manager gets increasingly frustrated with the new managers and can't stop themselves interfering in the work that they are paying other people to do. The owner manager has become a Meddler.

Typically, the Meddler spends much time second-guessing subordinates, introducing more refined (and largely unnecessary) management systems. The Meddler will probably go on courses and read books and become even more knowledgeable about management. Meddlers tend to get in early and leave late and, because they delve into the detail of everything, not surprisingly, they constantly find problems.

Because they've been used to working long hours and taking limited holidays, now that the management team is in place, the Meddler is unsure of their own role. What should they be doing with their day?

What happens next is fairly obvious. Either the new managers quit or the owner manager concludes that they might as well do the work themselves and sacks the new managers. The owner manager then reverts to being a Hero - until they decide to try building a management team again. Often, this oscillation repeats itself many times.



Becoming a strategist

For a business to achieve its full growth potential, the owner manager needs to become a Strategist. This means the owner manager letting go of day-to-day activities, empowering others to get on with them. The owner manager then has time to articulate a vision of the future, to plan how to bring that future about, and to make it happen. To coin a phrase, the owner manager is now working **on** the business, rather than **in** the business.

The Strategist develops the management skills of the team to the highest appropriate level and in depth. The Strategist spends most of their own time motivating and developing members of the management team, and looking forwards and outwards to shape the future of the business.

Moving from Hero to Strategist

These different behaviours are easy to describe and to recognize. The need to change behaviour in order to achieve the full growth potential of the business is also obvious. At the same time, for many owner managers, changing these behaviours is incredibly difficult to do!

The old behaviours are deeply rooted in strongly-felt emotions about the business and how activities should be performed. After all, it is **your** business and you've probably experienced major struggles along the way either in getting the business off the ground or in ensuring its survival to this point. To trust someone else, and to accept that that person will almost certainly do things differently, is a major challenge for many owner managers.

So, the vast majority of owner managers need some help in making this transition.

At the same time, not every owner manager wants to maximize the growth potential of their business. Some are in business because they love doing the very thing that the business does. This is often the case in creative industries such as design, architecture and software development. To give up the Artisan role entirely in order to become the Strategist, is simply not the future that they want for themselves. They need to find a balance that works for them and also recognize that the choices they make about the way they spend their time will influence the potential of the business. Becoming comfortable with these choices, helps many owner managers enormously to become re-engaged and re-energised by their business.



So what type of owner manager are you? And what type of owner manager do you want to be?

Our programmes are specifically designed to help ambitious owner managers create the future they want for their business and themselves. A vital part of that is to decide what role you want to play in future and how you want to spend your time. Our programmes help owner managers to

- Understand their current leadership role and the impact it has on their business
- Articulate the different and better future they want for their business and themselves including setting out the role they want to play in future and how they want to spend their time
- Assess the implications of these choices on the future potential of the business
- Make the transition from their current leadership approach to the new one that they want.

As a result, they achieve their ambitions for themselves and their businesses.

Take a look at www.yourbusinessyourfuture.co.uk/programmes