

A WORKING SYSTEM FOR ONE PRINCIPAL

The Chief of Staff **Kit**

The morning brief, weekly review, and delegation system
PILOT runs automatically. Runnable by hand.

Four routines. Paper and a calendar are enough.

This is the operating system PILOT runs for its principals — written out so you can run it by hand. Nothing here needs software. A notebook, a printed template, or a plain text file all work. What the system needs is not tooling; it is the discipline of four small routines.

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- 01

One big move a day
A day has one move that actually matters. The brief names it before the inbox gets a vote. Everything else is at most six supporting items — never more than seven in total.
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- 02

The inbox is quarantine, not home
Mail is where other people's priorities arrive. You visit it in batches, on your schedule, through three triage buckets. You do not live there.
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- 03

Commitments are tracked in both directions
What you owe and what you are owed sit in one ledger. Anything untouched for ten days is surfaced and either moved or renegotiated — never silently dropped.
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- 04

The week is scored, briefly
Friday, twenty minutes, five questions, one number out of ten. Not a retrospective ritual — a pulse. The score matters less than the trend.
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01	The Morning Brief	03 - 05
02	The Weekly Review	06 - 07
03	The Delegation Ledger	08 - 09
04	Inbox Quarantine	10

One page, before the day starts.

The brief is the core of the whole system. Written before you open email, it decides what the day is *for* — so the inbox reacts to your plan instead of writing it. The plan owns the brief by default; a fire has to earn its way in.

THE FORMAT — FOUR SECTIONS, SEVEN ITEMS AT MOST

§ A TODAY'S MOVE	Exactly one item. The single thing that, if it happens today, makes the day a win — named as an action with a person attached ("Answer Maya on the liquidation preference"), not a topic ("fundraising"). One line on why it is the move.
§ B WHAT'S HAPPENING	Today's meetings and hard commitments, each with the one thing you need to know walking in: who is in the room, what you owe them, what changed since last time. Preparation, compressed to a line each.
§ C STILL OPEN	Promises coming due — yours and theirs. Pull the two or three nearest-to-stalling items from the delegation ledger (§ 03). This is where balls stop getting dropped.
§ D THE READ	Two or three sentences of judgment, not news: what the pattern of the week is telling you, who has gone quiet, what can safely wait. If nothing needs saying, write nothing — silence is valid output.

THE 10-MINUTE MANUAL ROUTINE — BEFORE EMAIL, WITH COFFEE

- 2 min** **Scan the calendar.** Today and tomorrow morning. For each meeting, write one line: who, and what you owe them.
- 3 min** **Scan inbox subjects only.** Do not open a single message. You are looking for exactly one thing: a genuine fire that outranks your planned move. Almost every day, there isn't one.
- 2 min** **Pick the one move.** If two candidates feel equal, take the one that unblocks another person. Write it down with the person's name in it.
- 2 min** **List what can wait.** Fill "Still open" from the ledger and "The read" if there is one. Cap the whole brief at seven items — if it doesn't fit, it isn't today's.
- 1 min** **Close the tab.** The brief is done when it fits on one page and you'd act on it without re-opening anything. Now the inbox can have its first batch window — on your terms.

What a finished brief looks like

A filled brief for a fictional founder running two companies. Note the shape: one move with a name in it, one line per meeting, three open threads, a two-sentence read. Seven items, one page, ten minutes.

EXAMPLE — FICTIONAL

Alex Moreau — Tuesday

WRITTEN 07:05 · BEFORE EMAIL

TODAY'S MOVE

Answer Maya on the liquidation preference.

The term sheet expires Thursday; her lawyer is blocked on your position, and every day of silence reads as hesitation.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- 10:00 — Board prep with Jonas. You owe him the Q3 hiring plan; he flagged the sales-lead search twice already.
- 14:30 — Candidate call, VP Sales (Priya D.). Second round. Last time she asked about equity bands — have an answer this time.

STILL OPEN

- You promised Daniela the SOW — 12 days ago. Send it or renegotiate the date today.
- Tom owes you the security questionnaire for the Hartmann deal — day 6. Nudge tomorrow if quiet.

THE READ

Three of this week's open threads trace back to the same missing hire — the VP Sales seat is now the bottleneck, not the pipeline. The Hartmann deal can wait until the questionnaire lands; nothing else is urgent enough to touch the morning.

The first beat is relief. Calm beats complete.

Template — today's brief

Print a stack of these, or copy the headings into a text file. Ten minutes, before email.
Seven items at most.

DATE

WRITTEN AT

TODAY'S MOVE — ONE ITEM, A NAME IN IT

Why this, why today:

WHAT'S HAPPENING — MEETINGS, ONE LINE EACH

STILL OPEN — PROMISES COMING DUE, BOTH DIRECTIONS

THE READ — TWO SENTENCES OF JUDGMENT, OR NOTHING

Friday. Twenty minutes. One number.

The daily brief keeps the day pointed; the weekly review keeps the *weeks* honest. It is deliberately short — five questions and a score out of ten. Its job is to catch drift while it is still cheap: the stalled project, the relationship going quiet, the promise you have been quietly avoiding.

THE FIVE QUESTIONS

Q1 WHAT MOVED?	The two or three things that genuinely advanced. Name them precisely — "sent the SOW", not "made progress on Daniela". If you can't name them, that is the finding.
Q2 WHAT STALLED?	What did you expect to move that didn't? Write the honest reason next to each — waiting on someone, avoided it, or genuinely deprioritized. Only the middle one is a problem.
Q3 WHICH PROMISES ARE OVERDUE?	Walk the delegation ledger (§ 03), both directions. Anything at ten days or more gets a decision on the spot: do it Monday, renegotiate the date, or cancel it out loud.
Q4 WHO WENT QUIET?	Which relationship that matters had no touch this week — the co-investor, the key customer, the mentor? Quiet is how important relationships end. Pick one and put a touch on next week's calendar.
Q5 WHAT DID I LEARN?	One line. A fact about a person, a pattern in the business, a mistake worth not repeating. This is the compounding asset — a year of these is a private playbook.

SCORING THE WEEK

Score the week **out of ten**, gut-first, then check it against Q1 and Q2. A 7 means the big things moved and nothing important slipped. Don't overthink the number — its value is the trend line. Three weeks below 6 is not a bad month; it is a signal that the system, not the effort, needs changing.

Template — the weekly scorecard

Same slot every Friday. Twenty minutes with the ledger and the calendar open, then close the week.

WEEK OF

SCORE /10

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Q1 - WHAT MOVED

Q2 - WHAT STALLED, AND HONESTLY WHY

Q3 - PROMISES OVERDUE (≥ 10 DAYS) AND THE DECISION ON EACH

Q4 - WHO WENT QUIET · ONE TOUCH SCHEDULED FOR NEXT WEEK

Q5 - WHAT I LEARNED

NEXT WEEK'S ONE BIG THING

Commitments, tracked in both directions.

Most dropped balls are not forgotten tasks — they are promises that lived only in a conversation. The ledger is one page with two sides: **what you owe** and **what you are owed**. Both matter equally. Chasing what you are owed is not nagging; it is the half of delegation most founders skip.

HOW TO RUN IT

Capture at the moment of promising. The instant a commitment is made — in a meeting, a call, a hallway — it goes on the ledger with three facts: who, what, and by when. If it has no date, give it one; "soon" is where promises go to die.

Walk it twice. Each morning, the two or three items nearest to stalling feed the brief's "Still open" section. Each Friday, the whole ledger gets walked in the weekly review — every line either moved, renegotiated, or consciously closed.

THE 10-DAY STALL RULE

Anything untouched for ten days or more gets surfaced — no exceptions. Surfaced means one of three things happens the same day: you act on it, you renegotiate the date with the other person out loud, or you cancel it explicitly. What the rule forbids is the fourth option — the quiet fade, where you ghost the commitment and hope nobody notices. They notice.

WHY TEN DAYS

Long enough that normal week-rhythm work never trips it; short enough that nothing dies of neglect. After ten days of silence a promise stops being late and starts being a statement about how much the other person matters. The rule converts that silent statement back into an explicit decision — which is all a chief of staff really does.

A promise with no date is a wish. A promise past ten days is a decision — make it out loud.

Template — the ledger

One page, two directions. Add lines the moment a promise is made; walk the page every Friday. Circle anything at ten days.

YOU OWE — PROMISES YOU MADE

TO WHOM	WHAT, EXACTLY	PROMISED	DUE

YOU ARE OWED — PROMISES MADE TO YOU

FROM WHOM	WHAT, EXACTLY	PROMISED	DUE

Friday rule: every line is touched — moved, renegotiated, or closed out loud. Ten days of silence is a decision; make it explicit.

The inbox is quarantine, not home.

Email is where other people's priorities arrive, formatted as urgency. Treat it accordingly: nothing in the inbox gets your attention until it has passed triage. You visit quarantine on a schedule; you do not live in it.

THE THREE BUCKETS — EVERY MESSAGE LANDS IN EXACTLY ONE

NEEDS YOU

Only you can answer it, and it matters: a decision, a commitment, a relationship. These earn a place in a batch window — or, rarely, in the brief itself.

Typically a handful a day

NEEDS SORTING

Legitimate, but not a today-problem: an FYI to skim, a thread to forward, a task for someone else. Route it — forward, file, or ledger it — in under a minute each.

The middle of the pile

SAFELY IGNORED

Newsletters you never read, notifications, cold outreach, CC-theater. Deleting or archiving these unread is not a risk. It is the system working.

Most of the inbox

BATCH WINDOWS

Process email in **two or three fixed windows a day** — for example mid-morning after the move has had its first hour, early afternoon, and a short sweep at day's end. Outside the windows the inbox stays closed, notifications off. The morning routine's subject-line scan (§ 01) is not a window; it is a smoke detector.

Inside a window, work the buckets in order: answer what needs you, route what needs sorting, mass-archive the rest. The goal of a window is not inbox zero — it is **quarantine cleared of anything that needs a human**.

UNSUBSCRIBE RUTHLESSLY

Every "safely ignored" sender you unsubscribe from is triage you never do again. Once a week, pick the three noisiest recurring senders and unsubscribe or filter them. A quieter inbox isn't tidier — it makes the "needs you" bucket visible at a glance, which is the entire point.

A calm inbox is not the goal. It is the by-product of deciding, once, what deserves you.



WHERE THIS COMES FROM

This is the system PILOT runs for you.

Every routine in this kit is something PILOT does automatically — **the brief every morning at 07:00**, across every mailbox and calendar; the promises tracked in both directions and surfaced at ten days; the inbox triaged before you see it; the week reviewed and scored. Without you lifting a finger.

Run the kit by hand for two weeks. It genuinely works on paper — that is why we published it. You will also notice what it costs: the ten minutes every morning, the Friday discipline, the ledger nobody maintains on the days that matter most.

When you're ready to stop being your own chief of staff:

[WITHPILOT.AI/REQUEST-ACCESS](https://withpilot.ai/request-access)