

Sample — not a real client. A worked example of a Corrival Plateau Deep-Read, built from a composite founder so you can see what one looks like before you buy. A real Deep-Read is written from your own eighteen answers and signed before it's sent. Names, numbers, and details here are invented.

Composite: a two-founder brand & web agency, ~\$1.0M revenue, six people (three full-time, three contractors). You ("Founder A") run sales and clients; your co-founder ("Founder B") runs creative and delivery.

CORRIVAL · PLATEAU DEEP-READ

The Plateau Deep-Read

This is a read based upon your shape — where your effort is going, which pillar is leaking, what could be making it leak, and what to do first.

A \$1M agency, busier than ever, and stuck

Prepared from your eighteen answers

Two of your answers tell the whole story.

The moment you felt most stuck this quarter:

"signing a proposal I knew deep down was underpriced, but did it anyways because we needed the month to close strong."

The one thing you'd fix by Monday:

"get out of the weeds long enough to think."

Those aren't two problems. They're one problem you're feeling in two places. This read walks you to it.

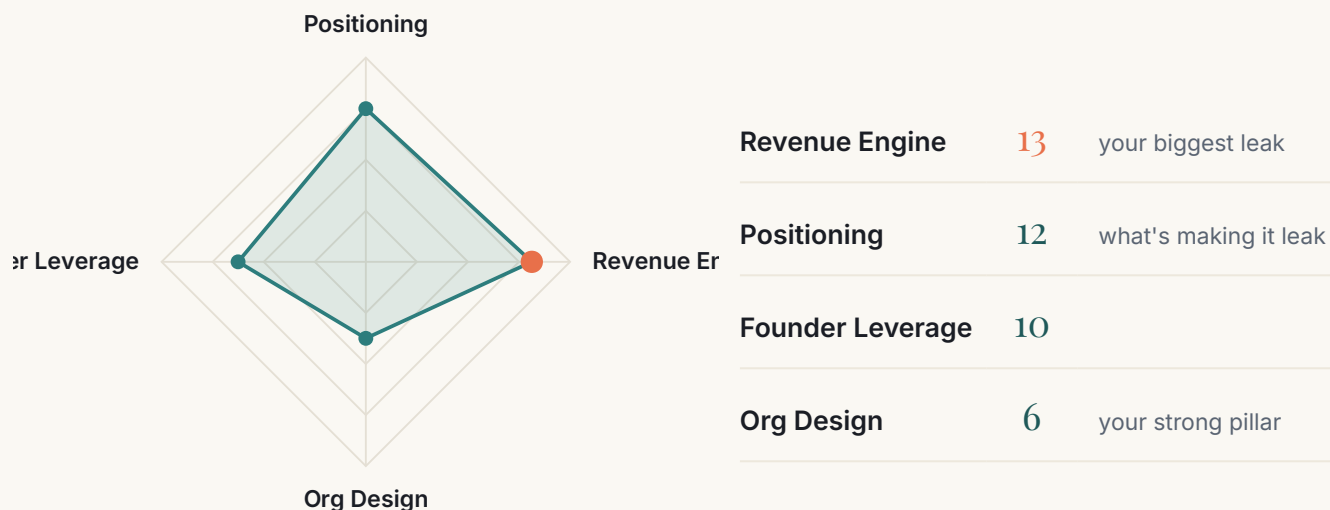
First, the good news, because it matters: you don't have a quality problem or an effort problem. The work is good. Clients refer you. You're full. The problem is most likely that all of it runs through the two of you. That's a fixable problem, but it won't fix itself, and working harder tends to make it worse.

One honest caveat before we start. This comes from a short set of questions, not from sitting inside your business — so read it as the most likely shape of things, not a verdict. The parts that ring true are where we'd dig deeper in a session. The parts that don't, we throw out. You know your business better than any quiz does.

1. Your shape

Four things hold a company together at your size: **positioning** (the reason a client picks you over another agency), your **revenue engine** (how new work shows up), your **org** (who really owns what),

and your **founder leverage** (whether your week is owner's work or operator's work). We score each out of 16 from your answers. **Higher means it's leaking more.**



In one line: **new work most likely depends almost entirely on you, your positioning looks like the reason it can't depend on anyone else, and you're both probably paying for it with your time.** Here's each pillar, plainly.

Positioning — 12. A prospect asked what makes you different from the agency down the street. On the diagnostic you said you "pivoted to features, pricing, or the relationship." In plain terms: you didn't have a clear one-line answer, so you changed the subject.

That likely happens because you've added services over the years — brand, then websites, then social, then ads, then retainers. Each was a reasonable yes. Added up, you probably do a little of everything now, which tends to mean you're known for nothing in particular. A client can't look at you and instantly think "they're the ones who do X." So you have to explain it, every time, in person.

Revenue Engine — 13. This is the leak. I asked what happens to your pipeline if you went offline for three weeks. You said "the pipeline is me — this question is almost absurd."

That one answer is most of this read. New work almost certainly comes from your network and the referrals it sends, and there's probably no real second source. So when you spend a few weeks heads-down on delivery and stop reaching out, the top of the funnel likely goes quiet — and you feel it as a slow month two months later. That slow month is probably when you sign the underpriced deal. Not because you're bad at pricing, but because an empty calendar is scarier than a thin margin.

Put a rough number on it. Say you take a \$14K project that should be \$22K. That's \$8K left on the table. If you do that three or four times a year when a month looks thin, that's easily **\$25–30K a year you're giving away** — not because the work isn't worth it, but because you had no other deal in the pipe to walk away to.

Org — 6. This is your strong pillar. Good news here. You have a team that can deliver without you watching every pixel. Most agencies your size never get that far. But notice what your team is built to do: make the work. It's likely that nobody but the two of you touches getting the work or pricing it.

You told me your last senior hire "took it, but I'm still checking in more than I expected." That's worth sitting with: even when you do delegate, it still pulls you back in. And at your stage, most agencies build the team around delivery first — getting the work tends to stay with the founders. If that holds true here, then no matter how strong delivery gets, the company's growth is still capped by whoever can bring the work in — which is most likely still the two of you. (Whether that's actually the case is exactly the kind of thing we'd confirm in a session.)

Founder Leverage — 10. Your week is sales calls and client management. Founder B's week is delivery and quality control. Both of you are full. When I asked how much of last week was work a hired CEO should be doing versus work you should have handed off, you said "most of it was work someone else should be doing."

So here's the trap: neither of you is doing the actual owner's work — deciding what you're known for, what you charge, and which clients to stop taking. Not because you're lazy. Because there's no hour left in the week for it, and because that work doesn't produce anything you can point to on Friday, so it always loses to the work that does.

Two founders, two full weeks, and zero hours spent running the business instead of working in it. That's the real reason last quarter felt like sprinting on a treadmill.

2. The two-founder blind spot

This one's more of an educated guess than the rest — the scores only hint at it — but it's the most common root behind the shape you're showing, so it's worth putting in front of you.

You probably divided the company early and cleanly. You took the front — sales and clients. Founder B took the back — craft and delivery. That split is likely why you work well together. It may also be why you're stuck.

Here's the logic. When you divide the work that neatly, some jobs tend to fall in the crack between you. The big one is positioning and pricing. It's not really your job — you're busy closing. It's not really Founder B's job — they're busy shipping. So it most likely ends up owned by no one. And the things no one owns don't tend to get better. They drift.

That may be the underpriced proposal again, at its source. The price was probably low because no one is really in charge of pricing. When no one owns the number, it tends to default to whatever wins the month — and winning the month is your job, so the default becomes "yes, and a little cheaper."

The uncomfortable part, said straight because you paid for straight: you've most likely decided who owns design and who owns the client relationship — but probably never decided **who owns the reason clients pick you and what you charge for it**. Until one of you takes that seat, positioning and pricing will likely keep sliding, because that's usually what happens to a job with no owner.

3. Your biggest leak — the engine runs on you

Every company has an engine that brings in work. The only question is whether it runs on a system or on a person. Yours runs on you.

This is normal at \$500K. It's a warning sign at \$1M. It's a hard ceiling past \$2M. Here's the simple reason: to grow, you eventually need to add sales capacity — more ways for work to come in. But you can't add another you. So the most your company can grow is however much new work you personally can drum up. That's the ceiling. You're most likely hitting it now, and it shows up as the slow months.

Here's how it probably plays out:

- 1 A few weeks of heavy delivery. You go quiet — no time to reach out.

- 2 The pipeline thins, because you were the only one filling it.

- 3 Two months later, a slow month arrives.

- 4 To save it, you take a deal you'd normally price higher, or pass on.

- 5 That deal eats your delivery time, so you go quiet again. Back to step one.

It's a loop, and you're the only thing keeping it spinning. The fix is not "sell less" — it's to build **one** reliable way for the right kind of client to find you and raise their hand without you starting the conversation. Just one. We'll get to which.

4. Why it won't fix itself — positioning is feeding the leak

Here's the part most people miss, and it's the most useful thing in this read.

Ask yourself: why do you have to be on every single sales call? Part of it is relationship, sure. But the bigger reason is probably this — your website and your referrals likely don't explain what you're actually best at. So a new lead can't easily tell whether you're the right fit. The only way they find out is for you to get on a call and explain it to them, live.

That's not selling. That's translating. And it's translating that probably only you can do, because only you carry the real pitch in your head. Which means the sales conversation is hard to hand to anyone else.

So watch what happens if you try the obvious fix and hire a salesperson right now. You'd hand them a list of services and a calendar. They'd get on calls and have no clear story to tell, because there isn't one written down. They'd struggle. You'd conclude "salespeople don't work for us" — when the real problem was that you handed them a job that can't be done without the missing one-pager.

That's why fixing the engine starts with fixing positioning. You can't take yourself out of the sale until the pitch can stand on its own without you in the room.

One more cost, because it's money: vague positioning is also why clients negotiate you down. When a client can't tell what specifically makes you the better choice, the only thing left to compare is price. Make the reason sharp and the conversation stops being "how much" and starts being "are they the ones who do this." That's where your margin comes back.

5. What to do, in order

Order matters more than speed here. Do these out of order and the later ones get harder.

1. Decide who owns positioning and pricing. (One conversation, this month. Free. Everything else needs it.)

Sit down with Founder B, off the clock, and decide who owns the reason clients pick you and the number on the proposal — not who does the design or the selling, who owns it. Probably you, with Founder B able to veto anything that hurts the work. This is the one move only the two of you can make.

2. Write down what you're actually best at. (A few weeks.)

Call your last ten clients — five who hired you, five who didn't. Ask three things: what were you comparing us to, what words would you use for the problem we solved, and who else was in the room when you decided. Don't pitch. Just listen and write it down. Their words are your positioning. Turn it into one page: who you're for, what you're better at than the alternative, and why. If that page sounds like your current website, you didn't dig deep enough.

3. Build one way for the right clients to find you. (One channel, not five.)

Pick a single way to get in front of your right-fit buyer — the one that fits how they actually look for an agency. Maybe it's publishing the specific kind of work you want more of, consistently, so people searching for exactly that find you. Maybe it's one referral partner relationship made systematic instead of accidental. The test isn't how many leads — it's whether a good lead can show up understanding why you're different before you've spoken to them.

4. Hand off the front of the sale. (Last, once the pitch can travel.)

Now the first call — qualifying, scoping — can be run by someone who isn't you, working from that one-pager. You step in later for the relationship and the close, where a founder actually helps. You're not leaving sales. You're leaving the front of it, which is where most of your hours go.

What to skip for now: Don't redesign the website yet (it can't be right until the one-pager is). Don't add a new service to save a slow month (that's the move that got you here). And don't hire a salesperson before step 2.

6. If you do only one thing this quarter

Build one way for a good lead to show up already understanding why you're different — without you starting the conversation.

That's most likely the single thing holding your ceiling in place. The slow months, the underpriced deals, the fact that neither of you has time to think — they probably all come back to one root: new work only exists when a founder personally goes and gets it. Fix that one thing and the rest should loosen. You get hours back. You stop signing cheap deals because now you have something else in the pipe. And for the first time, there's room in the week to actually run the business.

It's the same problem as the underpriced proposal, seen from the other side. You sign the cheap deal because there's no other conversation happening that you didn't have to start. Build a way for those conversations to start on their own, and you never have to sign the cheap deal again.

This is one quarter of focused work, and it is not the urgent-feeling kind. It will lose to your inbox every single week — unless the person who owns that seat blocks the time and protects it.

7. Your self-audit — rerun every quarter

Five questions. Answer them honestly every ninety days and watch the answers move.

- 1 **The engine.** If you went offline for three weeks, what happens to the pipeline? (You want: "it keeps moving." Today: "it's me.")

- 2 **The pitch.** Can someone on your team explain why a client should pick you, in two sentences, without a founder there? (You want: yes — and the same two sentences every time.)

- 3 **The hand-off.** What share of first sales calls still need you to explain what you do? (You want: heading toward zero.)

- 4 **The margin.** When did you last sign a deal you knew was too cheap because you needed the month? (You want: that date getting older.)

- 5 **The owner's hour.** How many hours last week did either of you spend on positioning, pricing, or which clients to drop — not delivery, not selling? (You want: more than zero, and on the calendar.)

If question 1 still says "it's me" next quarter, the dependency is still there — and nothing else on this page matters until it's gone.

A real Deep-Read is written from your own eighteen answers, signed before it's sent, and credits in full toward a Roadmap. — Cyril Allgeier, Corival