DECISION AUTHORITY GUIDELINES

This document answers the question that currently interrupts your week: "is it okay if I..." For every decision area, it defines what each role decides alone, what they decide and report after, and what they bring to the founder first. Fill it in with each owner in the room — the negotiation over where each line sits is half the value. Then publish it where the team looks daily. A boundary nobody can find is a boundary that doesn't exist.

HOW TO SET THE LINES

Build from receipts, not imagination. Pull 30 days of messages and list every decision that routed through you. Sort each into one of three columns:

- Decides alone: the owner's call, no check-in, no heads-up required.
- Decides and tells after: the owner moves at full speed, then drops a one-line note in the channel. This is how you stay informed without staying involved.
- Brings first: genuinely founder-level. This column stays short, and its test is real risk to the business — not your personal comfort. "I'd want to know" belongs in column two.

Calibration check for every threshold: if the owner used their full authority wrongly once this quarter, would it materially hurt the business, or just annoy you? If it would just annoy you, the line goes higher.

DECISION RIGHTS BY ROLE

DECISION AREA	DECIDES ALONE	DECIDES AND TELLS AFTER	BRINGS TO FOUNDER FIRST
Refunds and credits	up to $ ______	$ range ______	above $, or any legal threat ______
Discounts and pricing flex	______	______	______

DECISION AREA	DECIDES ALONE	DECIDES AND TELLS AFTER	BRINGS TO FOUNDER FIRST
Client deadlines	shifts up to X days ______	______	anything past a contracted date ______
Spending, one-time	up to $ ______	$ range ______	above $ ______
Spending, recurring	up to $/month ______	______	new contracts, anything annual ______
Client communication	all routine messages ______	service-recovery messages ______	angry client plus serious miss ______
Team task assignment	within their lane ______	pulling help across lanes ______	anything touching pay or hours ______
Process changes	inside processes they own ______	______	changes affecting every client ______

Add rows for the decision areas your harvest surfaced that this table doesn't cover. Every fire you install will add one or two.

SPEND THRESHOLDS

DEFAULT SPEND LINE FOR OWNERS (UNDER THIS, THEIR CALL):

____

REPORT-AFTER CEILING (UNDER THIS, DECIDE AND NOTE IT):

____

FOUNDER-FIRST FLOOR (ABOVE THIS, ASK FIRST): ______________________________

Most founders set these insultingly low on the first pass. Price what the approval delay costs — your interrupted afternoon, a client waiting an extra day, an owner learning her judgment isn't trusted — against the worst-case wrong call. You are usually paying thousands to insure against hundreds.

CLIENT-FACING RISK THRESHOLDS

Money is easy to threshold. Client risk needs its own lines:

- Routine communication, scheduling, and status updates: always the owner's.
- Service recovery for a small miss the client hasn't escalated: owner decides, tells after, using the make-it-right budget above.
- An already-angry client plus a serious miss, anything that could end the relationship, or anything screenshot-able going public: another set of eyes first.

OUR MAKE-IT-RIGHT BUDGET PER CLIENT INCIDENT (WHAT AN OWNER CAN SPEND TO FIX AN EXPERIENCE WITHOUT ASKING): ______________________________

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Thresholds can't cover everything. Principles fill the gaps — short, plain statements of how the founder thinks, so people can decide gray areas the way you would without asking you. Five examples in the house style:

> **TEMPLATE**
>
> *When a client is upset, protect the relationship first and the invoice second. We can recover money faster than trust.*

> **TEMPLATE**
>
> *A fast answer today beats a perfect answer Thursday. Say what we know, flag what we don't, follow up.*

> **TEMPLATE**
>
> *If a mistake is ours, we say so plainly and fix it at our cost. No creative narrating.*

> **TEMPLATE**
>
> *Never promise a date the delivery team hasn't confirmed.*

> **TEMPLATE**
>
> *When two principles collide, pick the one that protects the client experience, then flag it at the weekly review.*

Now write yours. Method: think of your last five judgment calls and name the rule you were actually following. That rule, in your natural wording, is a principle. Five to seven total — they have to be recallable under mild pressure on a Thursday afternoon.

PRINCIPLE 1: ______________________________

PRINCIPLE 2: ______________________________

PRINCIPLE 3: ______________________________

PRINCIPLE 4: ______________________________

PRINCIPLE 5: ______________________________

THE GRAY AREA RULE

When something isn't on the table and no principle clearly settles it: make the call you can defend, note it, and bring it to the weekly review — where it becomes a new row or a sharpened principle. The table gets smarter every week this way. That is the system working.

DOCUMENT STATUS

FIELD	ENTRY
Completed with owners on	__________
Published where	__________
Last updated	__________

Update this document at the weekly fire review whenever a gray area gets ruled on. A decision table that stops changing has stopped being read.