SMARTer Entrepreneurs

FREE QUICK CARD

DELIVERY I QUICK CARD SD-02

Find your bottleneck

Fifteen minutes, five pieces of work, and the questions a good coach would ask you.



The practice

In most businesses there is one place where work queues up. Everyone else is busy, deadlines slip anyway, and the queue forms outside one particular door. In a business that sells expertise, that door quite often belongs to the owner.

Work waits at one step, and speeding up the others does little. A consultancy found its reports spent six of nine working days waiting for the owner (an illustration). So find who work waits for, protect that time, make sure work arrives checked against a short list, and only then add help.

Where your work waits

Piece of work 1: who or what it waited for longest, and how many working days (draft report: my review, 6 days)	
Piece of work 2	
Piece of work 3	
Piece of work 4	
Piece of work 5	
The name that comes up most, and the total working days waited	

Use work finished in the last month. If it waits for a client, ask for what you need earlier. Your rule from now on: nothing reaches the bottleneck until someone has checked it against a short list.

Try this this week

Trace your five pieces of work first. Then book two fixed slots a week in the bottleneck's diary, and tell the team.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CARD

Coach yourself

Fill in the front first. Then take fifteen minutes with these, in writing.

1. Look at the name that comes up most. Is it yours?
2. Look at the total working days waited. What could you have done for clients with those days back?
3. What came back because it was not ready, and which three checks would have caught it?
4. Which two slots a week could that person protect, and who will ask them to give one up?
5. What will you tell the team about when reviews happen and what must be checked first?

If you catch yourself saying...

You hear yourself say	Try asking instead
"It's quicker if I do it myself"	Quicker for this piece, or for everything waiting behind it?
"We just need another person"	If you had them tomorrow, would the work still wait for you?
"I don't want to say no to anyone"	Could you say "yes, on Tuesday" instead of "yes, now"?

ONE HARDER QUESTION

If you are the bottleneck, what are you avoiding by staying one?

Keep it going

Decide who traces five pieces of work each month and which meeting looks at it. Put three dates in the diary: 3, 6 and 12 months from today.

When to get help

Changing a role, hours or contract? Ask an employment adviser first. Exhausted because everything waits for you? Talk to someone this week.

What a coach adds

This card gives you the questions. What it cannot do is notice which one you avoided. It is one of the SMARTer practice cards, covering the ten key areas of a business that sells expertise.

> Talk yours through with your SMARTer coach and mentor: book a Discovery Call at smarterentrepreneurs.co.uk

Quick card SD-02 v1, November 2026. Sources: Goldratt, The Goal (1984); Womack and Jones, Lean Thinking (1996); Modig and Åhlström, This is Lean (2012). © 2026 SMARTer Entrepreneurs. Free to share with other business owners, unchanged and with this notice.