SMARTer Entrepreneurs

FREE QUICK CARD

DIRECTION I QUICK CARD DL-02

Three choices on one page

Fifteen minutes, three choices, and the questions a good coach would ask you.



The practice

Ask most owners for their strategy and you will get an ambition, a list of intentions, or a slightly glazed look. A strategy is a way through a difficulty, so start by naming it.

So name the obstacle, then choose: where you will play, how you will win there, and what you will stop. An agency doing four kinds of work stopped events, PR and consumer work (£700,000 of its £2.4 million fees) and grew its retained work by £400,000. On its figures, yearly fees fall to £2.1 million and the margin (what is left after paying the people who do the work) rises from £767,500 to £855,000.

Three choices on one page

The biggest thing in the way (for example: too many kinds of work, no clear reason to pick you)
Where you will play: which clients, which services
How you will win there: what do your best clients say when they recommend you?
What you will stop, and from when
Three actions that carry out your choices
How you will know within 90 days whether you were right

A choice that does not stop anything is not a choice.

Try this this week

List last year's fees by service and by kind of client. Circle the one you would not start again today: your first candidate to stop.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CARD

Coach yourself

Fill in the front first. Then take fifteen minutes with these, in writing. An answer looks surprisingly different once it is on paper.

1. Read your obstacle back. Is it something your business could change, or only the market?
2. Could your best competitor write your "how you will win" line word for word?
3. When did you last stop offering something, and what happened?
4. What does the work you would stop actually leave after paying the people who do it?
5. Whose reaction to the stop line are you most worried about?

If you catch yourself saying...

You hear yourself say	Try asking instead
"We do a bit of everything for everyone"	Who would you disappoint if you chose?
"We can't afford to turn work away"	Which of that work would you be glad to lose?
"We've always served that sector"	Who decided that, and would you decide it today?

ONE HARDER QUESTION

If you were starting the business tomorrow, would you build the one you have today?

Keep it going

Decide who checks new work against the page and which quarterly meeting reads it. Put three dates in the diary: 3, 6 and 12 months from today. If exceptions creep back, keep the one rule.

When to get help

Ending client contracts or changing anyone's role: take legal or employment advice first. Selling or investment: a corporate finance adviser and a solicitor.

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 DL-02 v1, November 2026. Sources: Richard Rumelt, Good Strategy Bad Strategy (2011); Lafley and Martin, Playing to Win (2013); Brinckmann, Grichnik and Kapsa, Journal of Business Venturing (2010). © 2026 SMARTer Entrepreneurs. Free to share with other business owners, unchanged and with this notice.