Designed Architecture

Tools For Operators · https://jeffreysummers.com/docs/designed-architecture/

This is how you build an operation whose parts were decided inside it. Sixteen steps in three phases, two instruments you run the whole way through, and five rules that stand from here on. It works from wherever you're standing — six months from opening, five years in, thirty years in — because the one part nobody can sell you is the decision about how your building runs.

The Two Instruments

Every step below is one of these two pointed at something, so learn them first.

The read. The read is you looking at your own operation and saying what's happening in it, in your words, before anybody outside gets a vote. Four things: what's in the building, who decided it, what it's producing, and what you're competent to decide today. A report isn't a read. A dashboard isn't a read. A benchmark isn't a read. Those are somebody else's read handed back to you with your numbers in it. The read runs before every decision and it runs again on a cadence, because the building changes and so does what it needs.

The question. Two sentences, one instrument, run on every area of the operation. Forward: what do we need to do to innovate our ability to build a compounding business. Current: what are we doing that's inhibiting us from building a business that compounds, that we should just stop immediately. You need both, because they find different things. Forward generates — it produces something to build on an area where you assumed there was nothing available, which is what you'd never find by looking at what's broken. Current clears, because drag eats the same capacity the build runs on, so stopping funds the building. There's no third answer either direction. A part that isn't compounding is contracting, because holding steady costs something and something is paying for it. Ask it on the boring areas, not just the ones causing pain. The schedule, the position description, the review form, the safe policy, the way product gets received. Those decide more of what a Guest gets than the menu does, and nobody ever questions them.

Phase One — What You Are Building

One. Hold the operation as one structure. Front, back, top of house, the schedule, the standard, the review form, the menu, the cost structure, the pay. Not departments with separate scorecards. Parts of one structure, each carrying load and handing it to the next. That's what makes an operation compound instead of reset every shift.

Two. Name what you've been chosen for, and the load that comes with it. One sentence, specific enough that the operator down the street can't say it. Then name what the structure has to produce to hold that sentence up: Guests who come back for something specific, a cast more capable every period, standards that hold when you're not in the building, margin that comes from having been chosen. That's your standard, and it's what lets you judge a program in an area you've never studied. If the sentence won't come out sharp yet, that's the first work on the list and the most valuable, and nothing below is worth doing until it does.

Three. List the areas that decide how the operation runs. The ones where doing it differently on a Thursday moves money or moves a Guest. Most operations have a dozen or two, and the number comes out of your building, not off somebody's list. Name the ones you can't move separately — the lease, the code, the franchise agreement, the platform — so you know where you rule and where you rule hard around something that isn't yours to decide.

Four. Read where you're standing on your own path. What you're building this into. What you're competent to rule today and which areas you're about to get competent on. What you can spend in hours and periods, honestly. And what you're getting out of running it, because you're one of the five parties and your return is part of the design, not a reward at the end.

Phase Two — What Is In The Building Now

This phase produces one thing: a sorted list of every part in your operation. You need that list before you rule anything, because most of what you'd rule already has something sitting on it.

Five. Inventory every part and name who decided it. Every manual, every form in use, every template running the schedule, every position description, every program with a name, every system on a monthly fee. Next to each one, the name of the person who decided it. For most operators this is where the structure becomes visible for the first time, and where it gets obvious how much of it came from outside.

Six. On every part, ask who wrote it and what it was built to get around. Then ask whether that thing exists in your building today. A part somebody outside drew was drawn against a restaurant that isn't yours, carrying that restaurant's limits, so you're running a workaround for a problem that was never here — and nobody in your building can tell you why, because nobody here ever knew. A part your own people built years ago has the same problem once enough hands have passed it along. A step that can't say what it was built for, in this building, isn't a standard.

Seven. Read each part for its form. Would it run the same in any operation in the country, or does it work because it knows your Guests, your cast, and your room. A part that could run anywhere isn't carrying anything specific to your building. The form is the tell, not the language on the cover. A part can be well written, legally sound, correct in the abstract, and carry no load here.

Eight. Find out which parts are in the load path. A part in the load path takes load off the parts around it and makes them stronger. A part that isn't sits on top of the structure and something has to hold it up, and that something is you, every Tuesday. It taxes what's around it: its own vocabulary to teach, its own reporting to run, its own exceptions to remember, its own step at the worst moment on a Friday.

Nine. Set the bar for what working means, then sort the list. A part works when it holds without you in the building, takes load off what's around it, and needs less from you next period than last. Two things will argue with that bar: the part's own measure, which it was built to move, and your own hands propping it up every Tuesday. Now sort every part into three piles. Carries load. Taxes the structure. Can't say what it was built for. The second and third piles are your work, and the third pile comes out first, because nobody in the building can argue with you about a part that can't name its own reason.

Phase Three — Rule It

Ten. Find your line and build forward from it. Operators who want the compounding get impatient and take on more than their read covers, and every one of those is a part nobody engineered. Your line is the last area that was fully yours. Pull back to it and build out from there with your own rulings, one area at a time, at a pace your read can hold. The cast tells you where the line is: wherever they can state the standard without looking it up, you're inside it.

Eleven. Sequence the areas. The ones carrying your sentence from step two get built first, to your standard. Then wherever a mistake is expensive. Everything left runs to code minimum on purpose, with the reason said out loud, and the hours that frees go where being different actually

pays. Choosing where to be ordinary is how you fund being exceptional where it counts. Sequence against real hours and real dollars, or you'll rule things you never install.

Twelve. Rule the area. A ruling is a sentence: here's the standard, here's why, in this building. Yours, in your words. It takes knowing this cast, this Guest, this room, this menu, which is why it's the one part only you can draw. Everything downstream of it is labor you can buy. And it scales past your hours — the kitchen manager with twelve years rules his station work, the lead who owns the stage rules the table standard. Rulings go to whoever holds the read.

Thirteen. Rebuild everything that contradicts the ruling, before you announce it. Every document, every template, every position description, every system setting, and every belief sitting on that area. Whatever's in a cast member's hand at seven-forty on a Friday is what your operation runs, so a ruling with the old parts still in place isn't a design, it's an announcement. This is the step operators skip, and skipping it is why their decisions don't take and why they end up deciding that designing doesn't work in a real restaurant. The ruling took fine. It got overruled by a checklist. And rebuild, don't edit — what made the part wrong wasn't a line in it, it was where it came from, so an edited borrowed part is still borrowed.

Fourteen. Run the ruling across the five parties. Guest, cast, vendors, community, you. For each one, name what they get here that they can't get in the same form from the operation down the street. A blank on any of the five is a relationship running on parity, and parity relationships leave the day somebody quotes a better price. Every party also has to get something worth putting back in, because what they put back is the load next period runs on. This is the cheapest work in the whole process and the most skipped, because four of the five are invisible to a Guest.

Fifteen. Install it through the people doing the work. The standard comes out of what happens on the stage, so build it with the people on the stage and teach it through whoever owns the outcome. They come out more capable, and the standard ends up living in people instead of in paper, which is the only place it carries load.

Sixteen. Build the load path, then verify it's carrying. The standard shortens the training. Shorter training makes a cast member productive in fewer shifts. A more capable cast lets the schedule run leaner and steadier. A steadier schedule holds the standard on a Friday. Every part carries the next one's load on purpose: the schedule funds the standard, the review form measures what the standard says matters, the position description carries the authority the standard requires, the kitchen can hit the standard at the volume the book takes, and the cost

structure is built to fund what you're chosen for instead of trimming it. It's carrying when the cast can state the standard without looking it up and it holds on a Friday with you out of the building.

The Five Standing Rules

These aren't steps. They run the whole time, on every area, from here on.

Design instead of repair. Repair puts the structure back the way it was when it broke. Design moves it so the load gets carried somewhere it holds. The test is whether the work moved you past needing the work. A real answer ends a class of problem, the cast carries it, and your attention goes to the next area. Reps aren't repair. Training, pre-shift, line checks recur because the work recurs, and every rep deposits capability.

Buy facts and capabilities. Never buy a ruling. Facts are hold temps, cooling times, code, wage law. Nobody's operation gets a vote, so buy them freely. Capabilities are anything that leaves the structure able to carry more than it could before and stays after the seller's gone: equipment, a technique your kitchen owns, a skill added to your cast, hands to draft and format and train and install. Buy those aggressively. The ruling is the one thing you keep. Tell them apart by what's left when the vendor leaves — a capability leaves your people able, a ruling leaves you holding his document and holding it up.

In an area you don't own yet, buy the capability, then rule it. Menu engineering, the labor model, the cost structure. Pay to be taught it until you can rule it yourself. Those three decide pricing power and margin, which is the heaviest load in the building, so owning them is the highest-value competence you'll ever buy. You'll know it passed when he leaves and you can still do it.

Vet the source before money moves. You can judge a source in any area, including one you've never studied, by what he does before he sells. Have you read my building, and what did you find. Does your answer depend on my Guests and my cast. What does it take off my schedule, my review form, my cost structure, my standard. Who's making the decisions here. What does this cost me beyond dollars. What am I able to do when it's over, and what ends it. How will I know it took, in my building, on a Friday, with you gone. The ones who lead with a read are the ones worth hiring, and you'll know inside ten minutes.

Rebuild on contact and re-read on a cadence. Any older part you touch gets rebuilt from your ruling instead of edited around. And the read runs again on a schedule, because the building

changes, the cast changes, the Guest changes, and load moves. That's how a structure keeps carrying more instead of cracking where nobody's looking.

What It Costs And What It Builds

It's slower than ninety-nine dollars and it never finishes. Those are the two honest objections and neither one has an answer, because both are true.

What you get is a building where every part takes load off the next one, where the difference is carried instead of bought, where capability stays after the people who taught it leave, where price comes from having been chosen, and where the operation needs less from you every period instead of more.

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