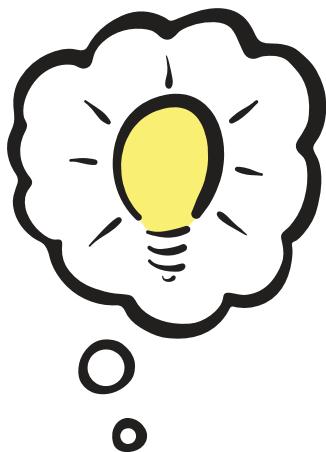


Conquer Your Most Frustrating BUSINESS CHALLENGES

**Solve the Right Problem
at the Right Time**

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**Feeling overwhelmed
by all the problems
you have to tackle
every day?**

**All the moving parts
that need to run
smoothly in order to
grow your business?**

What if you're solving the right problems, but at the wrong time?

Focusing all your energy on fixing the parts of your business that won't make much of an impact (at least not yet)?

Things like:

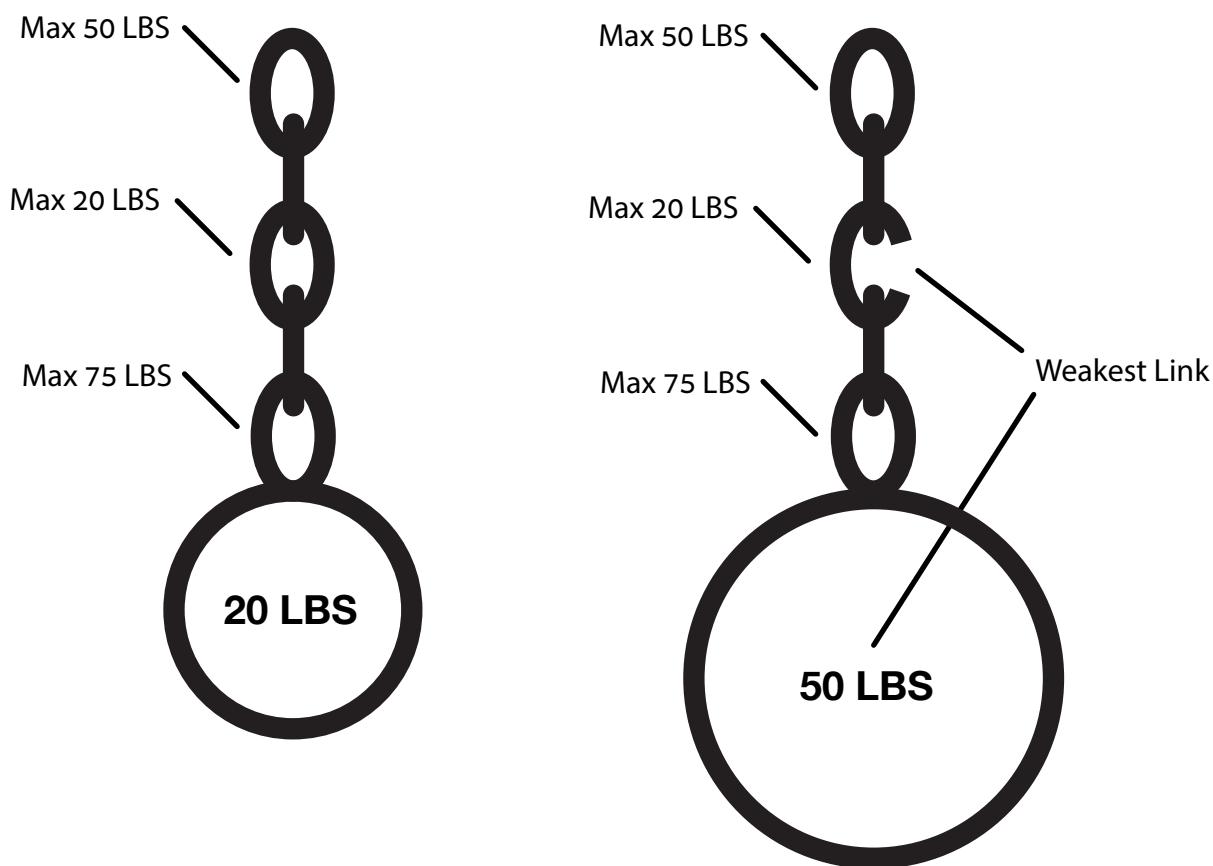
- Obsessing over your website's low conversion rate, while overlooking the fact that there's not enough quality traffic to the site to begin with.
- Tinkering endlessly with your job candidate selection and interviewing process, while overlooking the fact that you're not actually attracting any solid applicants.
- Agonizing over your company's visual branding, while overlooking the fact that there's nothing that truly differentiates your product from any other.

If you want to stop putting out fires and start solving the types of problems that will have a real impact on your business, you need to be able to focus on the right problems at the right times, without getting sidetracked by "urgent but not important" issues and other distractions.

A business is just a connected set of systems—a marketing system, a sales system, a product development system, a recruiting system.

Every part of your business is a system made up of separate but interrelated steps. And according to the Theory of Constraints (TOC), every system has a constraint or bottleneck.

Imagine a system as being like a metal chain. Every chain has a weakest link that limits its ability to accomplish a goal. If the goal is to lift something that weighs 50 pounds, but its weakest link can only handle 20 pounds, then the most that chain will be able to lift will be—20 pounds!



In other words, there's no point in strengthening the other links until you've found and fixed the weakest link. Once that's fixed, there will be the next weakest link to focus on, and then the next.

Now let's take our chain analogy and apply it to a common business problem like, "Our marketing isn't generating enough quality sales leads."

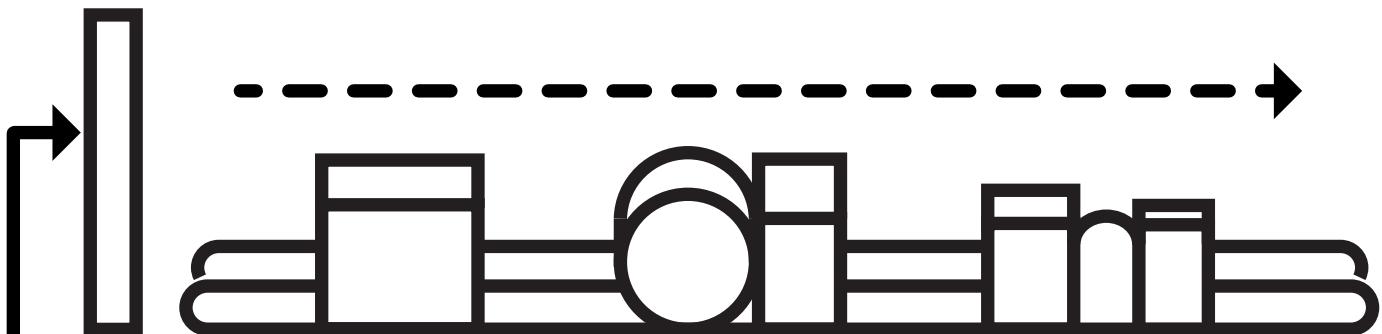
Your "marketing" is a chain made up of individual links (website traffic, messaging, CTAs, etc.). And your ability to achieve your goal (generating enough quality sales leads) will always be limited by the weakest link in that chain.

If your weakest link is "lack of quality traffic to your website and social channels," it won't do you much good to spend all your time perfecting your messaging and CTAs.

Until you fix your traffic problem, your results will always be limited by that weakest link.

Fixing the weakest link that's limiting the effectiveness of the entire chain is the fastest way to achieve your goal.

Imagine you're in charge of a factory that manufactures iPhones. There are 25 steps in the assembly line, starting with the raw materials entering the building, continuing with parts being created and assembled, and ending with a shiny new iPhone.



Let's assume that almost every step in that assembly line is working pretty efficiently. Not 100% perfectly, but well enough to keep cranking out new phones.

All except for the first step.

For weeks, the loading dock doors keep getting stuck halfway open, making it hard to move raw materials off of incoming trucks and onto your assembly line.

Step 1 (getting raw materials onto the assembly line) is slowing down every step that comes after it. Fixing this problem before spending time optimizing the other steps would immediately boost the output of the entire system.

Seems like basic common sense, right? And yet...

How many companies spend months building the “perfect” website—before they’ve even figured out how to generate any quality traffic?

Or spend months building the “perfect” product—before testing out a workable prototype in the marketplace?

Or spend months creating the “perfect” long-term organizational structure—before they’ve even figured out how to attract good candidates for the roles they already have in place?

None of this means that you shouldn’t try to build a good website, or make your product better, or plan ahead for growth.

Just don’t spend all your time perfecting the steps that come later in the process, until you’re sure that the earlier steps aren’t creating bottlenecks that slow down the entire system.

5 Steps for Quickly Solving a Complex Business Problem

Here are five steps for quickly solving complex business problems, based on the Theory of Constraints.

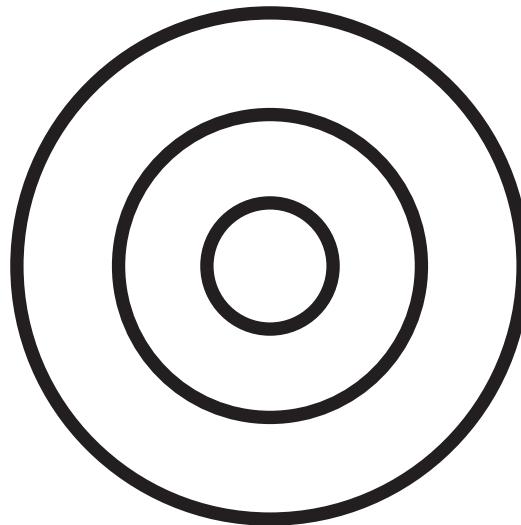
1. Pick a high-level, fact-based, and objective goal.
2. Zoom out to clearly see all the big links in the chain (the critical functional outcomes needed to achieve your goal).
3. Identify the weakest big link in your chain.
4. Zoom in and look more closely at the smaller links.
5. Solve the problem (fix the right link—one that's small enough to wrap your head around, but not so small that fixing it makes little difference).

Step 1: Pick a Goal

Your goal should be high-level, fact-based, and objective—not an assumption about the best solution to a specific problem.

“Increase our revenue by 20% by the end of next year” is a high-level, fact-based, and objective goal.

“Find a sales trainer to teach our sales team how to improve their close rate...so that we can increase our revenue by 20% by the end of next year” is a subjective opinion about the best solution, camouflaged as a goal.



Step 2: Identify the Big Links First

Zoom out so that you can clearly see the entire chain—and all the big links in that chain—that make up the goal.

These big links are the critical functional outcomes related to your high-level goal. “Increasing revenue by 20% by the end of next year” will result from specific marketing, sales, product development, customer retention, and other outcomes.



Step 3: Identify the Weakest Big Link

Which of the big links (critical functional outcomes) in your chain is the weakest one?

If your goal is “increasing revenue,” which functional outcome is currently your biggest bottleneck? Is your marketing not generating enough leads? Is your sales team struggling to close deals? Do you have a high customer churn rate?

Maybe there’s a big link that’s missing altogether. Do you have a sales strategy, but no process for improving inbound traffic? Is all your energy being invested in product development, with little thought given to figuring out the exact types of customers you’re building it for?

Before you commit to finding a solution, stop and ask yourself:

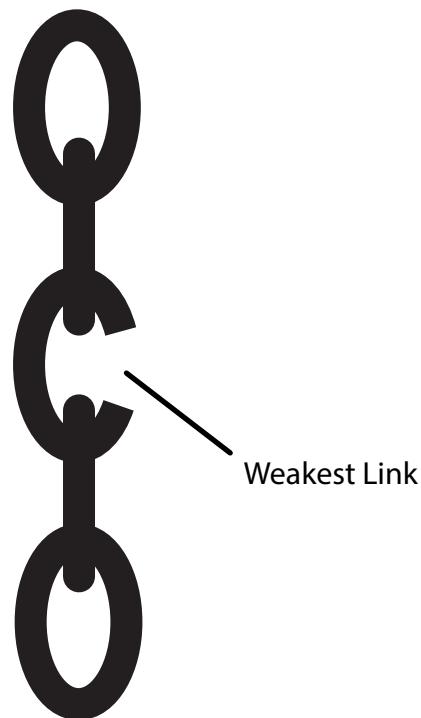
“Is this problem the critical bottleneck that’s currently getting in the way of achieving my goal?”

In other words, is there a more pressing problem that requires your attention first? An issue that will limit the potential positive impact you’ll get by solving that

original problem?

- Fixing your website's low conversion rate won't help much if your website gets little targeted traffic.
- Perfecting your job candidate selection and interviewing process won't help much until you figure out why you're not attracting any solid applicants.
- Creating the most stunning visual branding for your company won't help much if prospects don't see why your product is the perfect fit for their particular needs.

If you're not addressing the critical bottleneck, you want to take a moment to think about where you could better invest your limited resources.

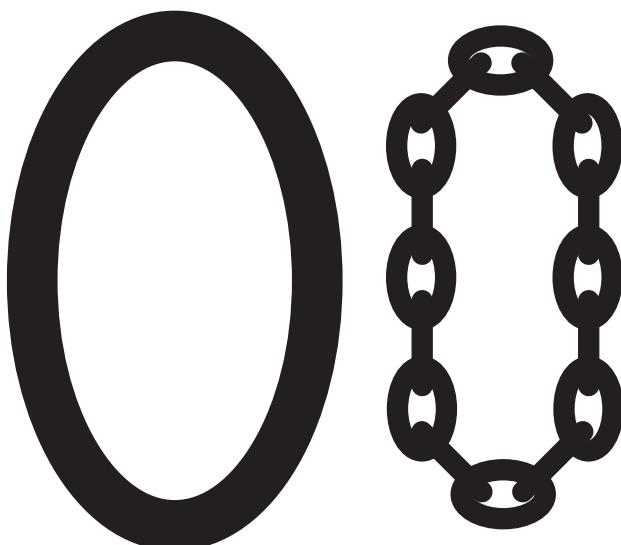


Step 4: Look at the Smaller Links

Once you've identified your weakest big link, the next step is to zoom in even further.

Imagine that each big link is actually just another chain made up of smaller ones. For example, if you determine that your weakest big link is your marketing, you'll want to take a close look at all its smaller links like messaging, target audience, and branding.

Once you've identified the weakest of those smaller links, you may decide to zoom in even further. If you haven't yet picked a target audience, is it because you're still unsure about your options? Are there internal alignment issues you need to address? Are you struggling with your own fear of making the wrong choice?



Step 5: Solve the Problem

By now, you should have a much better sense of which problem you'll want to start solving first. A link that's small enough to wrap your head around, but not so small that fixing it makes little difference.

Let's dig a bit deeper into this last step, using the following problem as an example...

“We've not yet clearly defined the ideal customer profile—including their specific needs and challenges—that our marketing and sales strategies will be built around.”

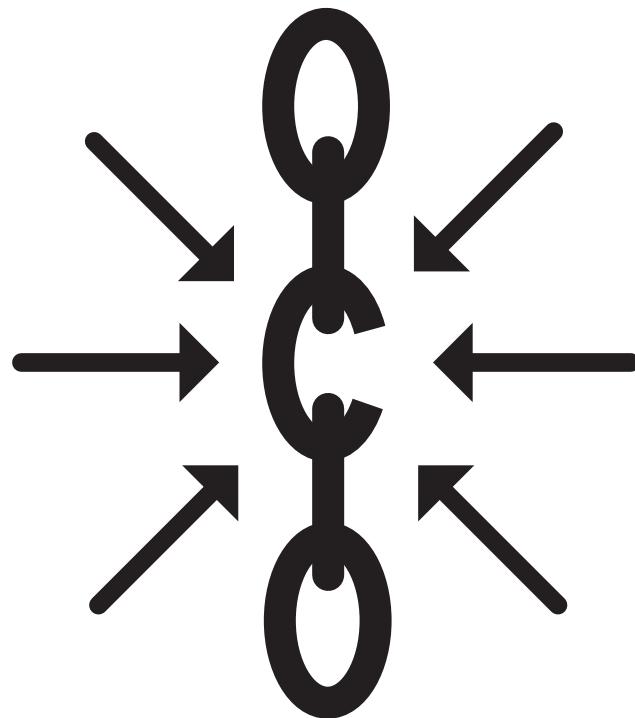
What if instead of immediately trying to figure out a solution, you took the time to look at the problem from multiple angles? By taking a step back, you open yourself up to a much broader field of possible solutions than if you just approached the problem from one narrow point of view.

How can you see a problem from multiple angles? It starts with asking yourself better questions, like:

- Why haven't we defined our ICP yet? What's been getting in the way?

- How might other people in my company be interpreting this problem?
- What are all the moving parts, components, and assets that need to be in place?
- What specific decisions would we need to make in order to solve this problem?
- What are the first principles that relate to this problem? The core truths that we need to be aware of to make a good decision?

By taking the time to ask better questions and look at your problem from multiple angles, you may be surprised at how much easier it is to discover a breakthrough solution.



Find the Next Link to Fix

Solving a complex business problem isn't a one and done deal. It's an ongoing process of identifying the weakest link, fixing it, and then identifying the next weakest link to focus on.

And that next link may or may not be directly related to the first.

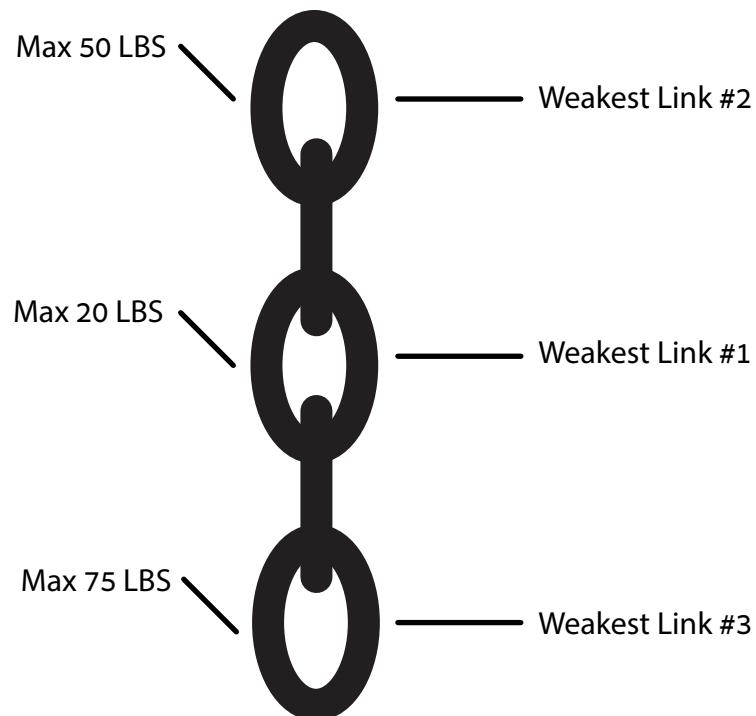
Zoom back out and look at all the big links in your chain. By going back to that high-level view, you may discover that the next weakest link is related to a different functional outcome.

Remember, you're not looking for just any problem to solve. You're looking for the problems that will have the greatest impact on your success.

If your first weakest link was a marketing problem, the next could be another marketing problem as well. But it could just as easily be related to sales, customer retention, employee recruiting, or any number of other parts of your business.

The key takeaways to consider are:

- Once you've fixed the weakest link in the chain, there will always be a new weakest link to discover and focus on.
- That next weakest link may or may not be directly related to the same functional outcome (marketing, sales, HR, etc.).
- Discovering the weakest links in your business is an ongoing practice of zooming in and out—being able to see both the big picture and the granular details.



Conquer Your Most Frustrating Business Challenges

Want help unpacking the obstacles standing in your way? I'd be happy to be a sounding board for you.

No strings or expectations. Just a chance to bring a fresh perspective that can help you see the best path forward.

To schedule your complimentary intro session, visit <https://marcusschaller.com> (available in the US only).

In the meantime, check out Your Morning Spark (<https://marcusschaller.com/your-morning-spark>), my weekly email and podcast for entrepreneurs who want to conquer their most frustrating business challenges.

Marcus Schaller

**I Help Overwhelmed Entrepreneurs Conquer
Their Most Frustrating Business Challenges**

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