

The Purpose Pyramid

A hierarchy that forces clarity: survival 'success' significance 'legacy.

TIER: BOARD / FOUNDER / HOUSEHOLD

TAG: IDENTITY ' ASSIGNMENT ' STEWARDSHIP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Purpose is a ranked hierarchy of aims enforced by trade-offs, not a slogan.
- Most teams are not under-strategised; they are under-disciplined (no priority stack, no kill list, no cadence).
- Incentives reveal the truth: people obey what is rewarded, not what is preached.

OPERATING LOGIC

Why a hierarchy

You cannot pursue every good simultaneously. A hierarchy prevents mission creep by turning philosophy into operational constraint.

Trade-offs are the receipt

Anybody can write purpose. Only leaders who accept trade-offs actually have it. Trade-offs are the proof.

Incentives tell the truth

If your rewards contradict your stated purpose, your purpose becomes theatre. Incentives are the enforcement layer.

APPLICATION PLAYBOOK

1. Step 1 — Identify the current tier

Decide the tier you are actually operating in: Survival, Success, Significance, or Legacy.

'Output: One sentence: "We are in ____ tier because ____."

2. Step 2 — Lock non-negotiables

List 3–7 constraints that cannot be violated: regulatory, moral, reputational.

'Output: Non-negotiables list + owners.

3. Step 3 — Build the priority stack

Rank five priorities. If you cannot rank them, you do not have priorities.

'Output: Priority stack (P1–P5).

4. Step 4 — Create the kill list

Stop anything that competes with the priority stack.

'Output: Kill list + stop date.

5. Step 5 — Install cadence

Weekly: progress and blockers. Monthly: metric review.

'Output: Cadence calendar.

KEY METRICS

Priority compliance rate	Measures discipline: are we executing what we claim matters?	Weekly
Active initiative count	Too many initiatives is a predictable failure mode.	Monthly
Incentive alignment score	If rewards contradict purpose, drift is guaranteed.	Quarterly
Trust signal proxy	Trust collapses late; measure earlier signals.	Quarterly

BOARD QUESTIONS

- ? *What tier are we actually in—and what evidence proves it?*
- ? *Which trade-off did we accept this quarter that proves purpose is real?*
- ? *Which incentive currently rewards the opposite of what we claim to value?*
- ? *What are we willing to stop doing—clearly, publicly, permanently?*