OPERATING PRINCIPLES

[Company/Project Name]

Version: 1.0 | Last Updated: [Date]

What Is This Document?

Operating Principles are the decision-making guidelines that govern HOW you operate. When faced with a choice and no procedure exists, these principles provide the answer. They're the DNA of your organization's behavior.

How to Use This Document

When making any decision, especially in ambiguous situations, consult these principles in order:

1. Does a documented procedure exist? → Follow it.

2. No procedure? → Apply the relevant Operating Principle.

3. Still unclear? → Escalate to document a new procedure.

Core Operating Principles

1. Quality Standard

What level of quality defines everything you do?

> [Define your quality bar. Be specific enough that someone can measure against it.]

Practical Application:

- Before releasing anything, ask: [Quality check question]

- When in doubt between speed and quality, choose: [Your choice]

- Minimum acceptable standard: [Specific criteria]

2. Customer/Client Experience

How do you treat the people you serve?

> [Define the experience standard. What should every interaction feel like?]

Response Standards:

Situation	Expected Response
Initial inquiry	[Response time and approach]
Problem/complaint	[Response time and approach]
General question	[Response time and approach]

Communication Tone: [Describe the voice: formal/casual, detailed/concise, etc.]

3. Financial Discipline

How do you treat money?

> [Define your financial philosophy in 1-2 sentences.]

Spending Guidelines:

- Expenditures under $[X]: [Who approves, what criteria]
- Expenditures $[X] to $[Y]: [Who approves, what criteria]
- Expenditures over $[Y]: [Who approves, what criteria]

Financial Priorities:

1. [First priority - e.g., "Maintain 3-month operating reserve"]
2. [Second priority]
3. [Third priority]

4. Time and Priority Management

How do you decide what to work on?

> [Define your prioritization philosophy.]

Priority Framework:

Priority Level	Definition	Response Time
Critical	[Definition]	[Time]
High	[Definition]	[Time]
Medium	[Definition]	[Time]
Low	[Definition]	[Time]

Time Protection Rules:

- [Rule about meetings]
- [Rule about deep work]
- [Rule about availability]

5. Communication Standards

How do you communicate internally and externally?

Internal Communication:

- Default channel: [Tool/method]
- Urgent matters: [Tool/method]
- Documentation: [Tool/method]

External Communication:

- Response time commitment: [Timeframe]
- Tone and style: [Description]
- Escalation path: [Process]

Meeting Principles:

- Default meeting length: [Duration]

- Required for every meeting: [Agenda? Notes? Decision log?]

- Meeting-free time: [Protected hours/days]

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6. Problem-Solving Approach

How do you handle issues when they arise?

> [Define your problem-solving philosophy in 1-2 sentences.]

Problem Response Framework:

1. **Acknowledge** — [How quickly? To whom?]

2. **Assess** — [What questions to ask?]

3. **Act** — [Immediate containment steps]

4. **Analyze** — [Root cause investigation]

5. **Adjust** — [System/procedure update]

Escalation Triggers:

- Escalate immediately if: [Criteria]

- Escalate within 24 hours if: [Criteria]

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7. Continuous Improvement

How do you get better over time?

> [Define your improvement philosophy.]

Improvement Cadence:

Activity	Frequency	Owner
Procedure review	[Weekly/Monthly/Quarterly]	[Role]
Metrics review	[Frequency]	[Role]
System audit	[Frequency]	[Role]

Documentation Rule: Every repeated task must have a documented procedure within [X] occurrences.

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8. Team/Partnership Standards

How do you work with others?

> [Define your collaboration philosophy.]

Hiring/Partnership Criteria:

- Non-negotiable requirements: [List]

- Preferred attributes: [List]

- Disqualifying factors: [List]

Accountability Standards:

- How commitments are tracked: [Method]

- What happens when commitments are missed: [Process]

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9. Technology and Tools

How do you approach systems and automation?

> [Define your technology philosophy.]

Tool Selection Criteria:

1. [Criterion 1 - e.g., "Must integrate with existing stack"]

2. [Criterion 2]

3. [Criterion 3]

Automation Rule: If a task is performed [X] times, it must be evaluated for automation.

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10. Personal Conduct

What behavior is expected from everyone?

> [Define the behavioral standard in 1-2 sentences.]

Core Behaviors:

- [Behavior 1 - e.g., "Own your mistakes publicly"]

- [Behavior 2]

- [Behavior 3]

- [Behavior 4]

- [Behavior 5]

Zero Tolerance:

- [Behavior that is never acceptable]

Principle Hierarchy

When principles conflict, resolve in this order:

1. **Safety and Legal Compliance** — Always first

2. **[Your #2 Priority]**

3. **[Your #3 Priority]**

4. **[Your #4 Priority]**

Adding New Principles

When a recurring decision pattern emerges that isn't covered:

1. Document the situation and decision made

2. Propose a new principle or modification

3. Review against existing principles for conflicts

4. Add to this document with version update

Review Cadence

Review Date	Reviewer	Changes Made

"Operating Principles are the invisible hand that guides behavior when no one is watching and no procedure exists."
— Sam Carpenter, Work the System