

THE \$1MIL+ TRADE BUSINESS PLAYBOOK

39 BUSINESS SECRETS EVERY AUSSIE
TRADIE BUSINESS OWNER NEEDS TO
KNOW ... BUT ISN'T TAUGHT



You don't learn this stuff on the tools.

We're Andy and Angela Smith, tradies turned business owners turned coaches.

When we started Dr. DRiP Plumbing in 2000, we were pumped. Great trade, great team, phones ringing off the hook. At our peak, we had 17 tradies and 8 vans on the road.

And for a while, life was bloody good.

Andy was cruising around in his shiny V8 ute like a bit of a tosser, the boys would strut into suppliers like they owned the joint, and money was rolling in. We were loving it. Business was booming.

Then something changed.

Like a switch got flicked. We went from making \$50K months to losing \$50K months, almost overnight.

That's when things started to unravel.

We had no systems.
Andy kept everything in his head (bad idea).
Cash flow was in chaos.
We were working harder than ever and feeling more stressed, more stuck.

We were burnt out and bickering. Our marriage and business were both on the line.

Sound familiar?

That's why we created this playbook.

We learned the hard way, through trial and error, and a whole lot of expensive mistakes. What we wish someone told us earlier is this:

Being good at your trade isn't enough.

Running a business is a different skill set.

No one teaches tradies how to run a business. TAFE shows you how to follow the rules. Your first boss showed you how to swing a hammer.

But no one shows you how to make money, grow a team, or take a bloody holiday without the wheels falling off.

That's what this is about.

Here are 39 real-deal business truths every tradie needs to know, but no one talks about.

They'll challenge you.

They'll probably hit a few nerves.

But they'll also show you the path to real profit, control, and freedom.

Let's get into it.

Andy & Ange Smith



39 Business Secrets

EVERY TRADIE BUSINESS OWNER NEEDS TO
KNOW... BUT ISN'T TAUGHT UNTIL NOW!

1. Profit comes first, not last

Chasing revenue won't keep your business afloat. You can be flat out and turn over a million dollars a year yet still end up empty-handed. Revenue is vanity; profit is what counts. Build profit into every quote by knowing your costs, locking in healthy margins, and setting prices that guarantee a real return - don't just hope there's something left at the end.

TURNOVER

is vanity.

PROFIT

is sanity

2. Your job management software is only doing 20% of the job

You've got the software. Great. But are you using it properly?

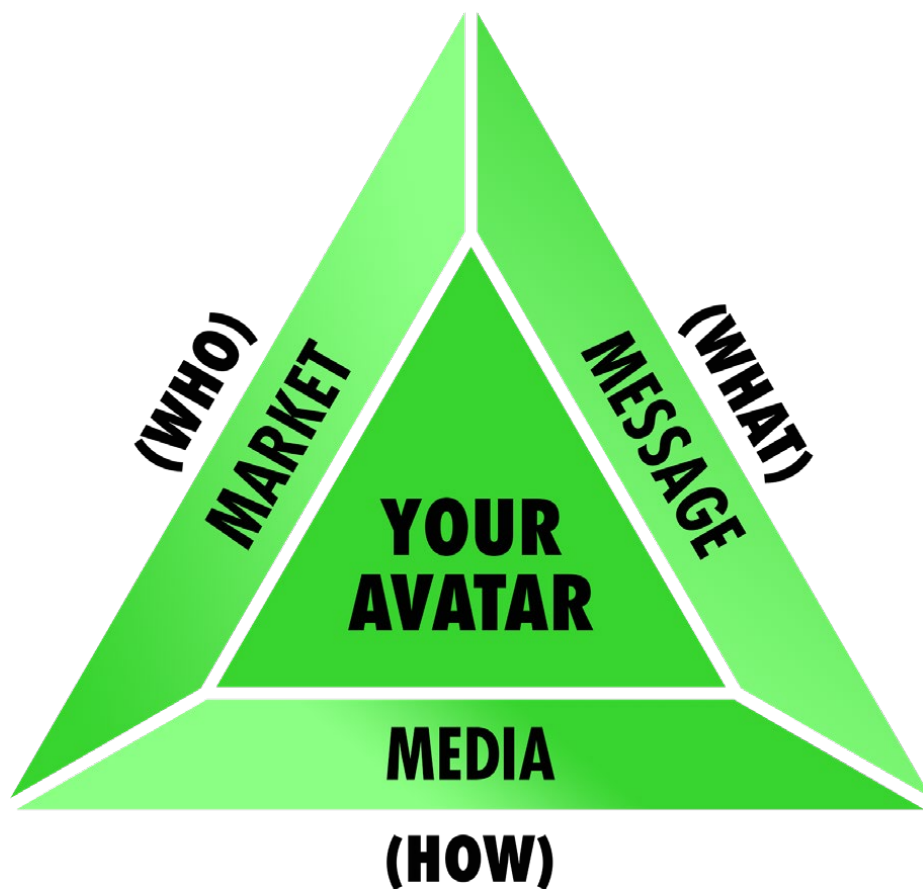
Most tradies only use it to log jobs and take notes, while missing out on quoting templates, scheduling, job costing, and tracking billable hours. You're paying for a Porsche and driving it like a wheelbarrow. It's time to use it as the engine room of your business.

3. Marketing isn't flyers and discounts, it's messaging

Most tradies throw out a few flyers or boost a Facebook post and call it marketing. That's not how you attract ideal customers.

Marketing is about using the right words, at the right time, in the right places to the right audience/person.

THE 3M'S OF MARKETING™



4. Your team's performance reflects your leadership

If your team is cutting corners, showing up late, or delivering average work, it's not just their fault.

Leadership starts at the top. Are expectations clear? Are you training them properly? Do they know what success looks like? Culture isn't an accident, it's created by you.

5. You're not charging enough (and you know it)

We hear this all the time: "But my clients won't pay that."

Yes, they will ... the right ones will. The ones who understand the value you bring. Pricing isn't just about covering costs. It's about charging what the job is actually worth so you can grow a profitable business.

6. Quoting should take minutes, not hours

Still quoting at night or on weekends? That's not sustainable. You can build out a quoting process using templates, pricing models, and workflows that let you quote on the spot (or within minutes).

It saves hours of admin time and makes you look sharp in front of the customer.

Bonus: your conversion rate goes up.

7. You make or break a sale the moment you say "Hello"

First impressions count. The moment you pick up the phone sets the tone for the entire job. A rushed or annoyed greeting can lose a customer before you even quote. Make sure whoever answers is friendly, calm, and professional, because that simple hello can be the difference between winning or losing the work.



8. Giving a pay rise with no expectations is a mistake

When an employee asks for more money, don't panic and agree on the spot. A pay rise should come with clear goals - extra responsibilities, higher standards, or improved performance. Set those expectations upfront and ask what they'll deliver in return so the increase is earned, not assumed.

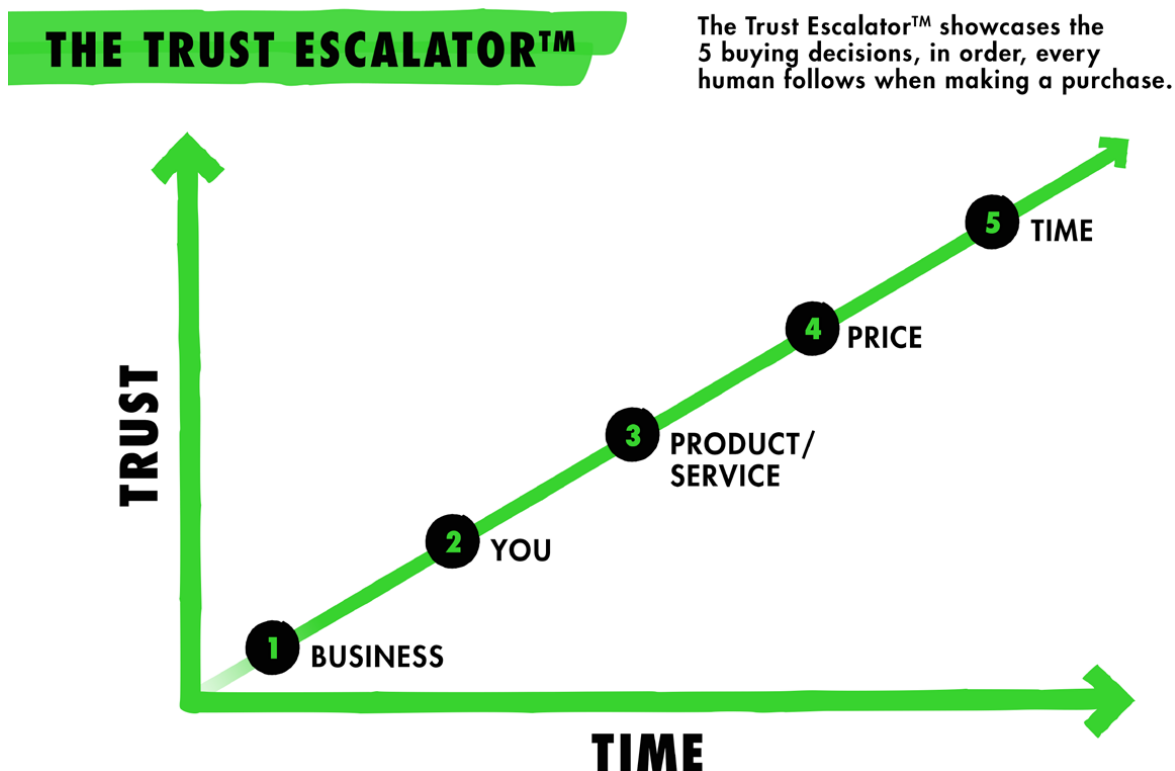
9. The biggest cost in your business is not what you think

You might think it's materials, fuel or wages. But the hidden killer? Time. Every job that gets delayed, a quote takes too long, a staff member sits idle, or are simply too slow, you're burning money.

If you don't measure time and productivity, you'll never know where the money leaks. Time is your biggest cost. You've got to control it.

10. Climb the trust escalator to win work

Customers buy from tradies they trust. Understand how they make decisions and guide them step by step. Understand each step of The Trust Escalator™ to influence a buying decision. Each action builds confidence, making it easier for them to choose you and say yes to the job.



11. You don't need to do all the work yourself

If you're still answering phones, quoting, invoicing, AND on the tools... something's gotta give.

Hiring the right help, even part-time admin or apprentices, can create space for you to grow. But don't just hire bodies. Hire strategically based on profit, roles and future needs.

12. You can't improve what you don't measure

Would you build a house without a tape measure? Of course not. But most tradies run their business without knowing their numbers.

You need to know your charge-out rates, gross profit margin, overheads, and break-even point. Without them, you're guessing.



13. Your database is gold

Social platforms can change anytime, but your database is yours. Use Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn to draw in new leads before they buy (and keep past customers coming back). Stay in touch with regular emails so you're top of mind for first-time jobs and repeat work. A well-kept database is your most dependable source of profit.

14. No one wins when your partner's in the dark

If you run the business with your partner (or they help out with admin) you need to be clear on roles, responsibilities, and boundaries.

Business stress often bleeds into family life.

Communicate openly. Make joint decisions. Treat it like the business it is.

15. Cash flow problems are rarely about the customer

Late payments are frustrating. But 9 times out of 10, cash flow issues come from within ... inconsistent invoicing, slow follow-ups, or unclear terms.

Tighten your payment systems. Set expectations from the start. Invoice promptly. Chase up daily. This is about cash in the bank, not good intentions.

16. Without your health, there is no business

You're the engine of your trade. If you burn out or get sick, the whole operation slows or stops. Look after yourself first - eat well, rest, and stay active - because your health is the foundation of your income and the future of your business.



17. Profit is not greed

Profit is the reward for running a smart business, not something to feel guilty about. It keeps the lights on, pays your team, and funds future growth. Charging correctly means you can deliver quality work and stand behind it. When your pricing reflects the real cost of doing business, you're protecting your livelihood and your customers' trust.

18. DIY business advice will only get you so far

You're a gun at your trade. But business? That's a different skill set.

Learning through trial and error is slow, expensive and painful. There's a smarter way: get help from people who've done it before and shortcut the learning curve.



19. Word of mouth work could be killing you

Referrals feel flattering, but not all are good for business. Low-margin or price-driven jobs eat time and profit, trapping you on the tools. Set clear standards and decline work that doesn't fit your ideal customer. Protecting your pricing and brand beats chasing every "free" lead.

20. Being busy is a trap

If your calendar's full but your bank account isn't, you've got a problem.

Busyness is not success. It often hides inefficiencies and undercharging. Take a step back and work out what's actually profitable ... and where you're wasting time.

21. Communication builds trust (& sales)

Clear communication wins work. Whether in person, on the phone, by email or text, how you speak, listen and present yourself builds trust and repeat business. Strong body language, eye contact and professional wording matter. If selling isn't natural, learn it, great communicators keep customers coming back.

22. Finance is your job, even if you hate numbers

Thinking "she handles the books" isn't good enough if neither of you understand what's going on.

You don't need to be an accountant, but you do need to know what metrics are critical to monitor on a monthly, weekly or daily basis. If you don't, you're flying blind.

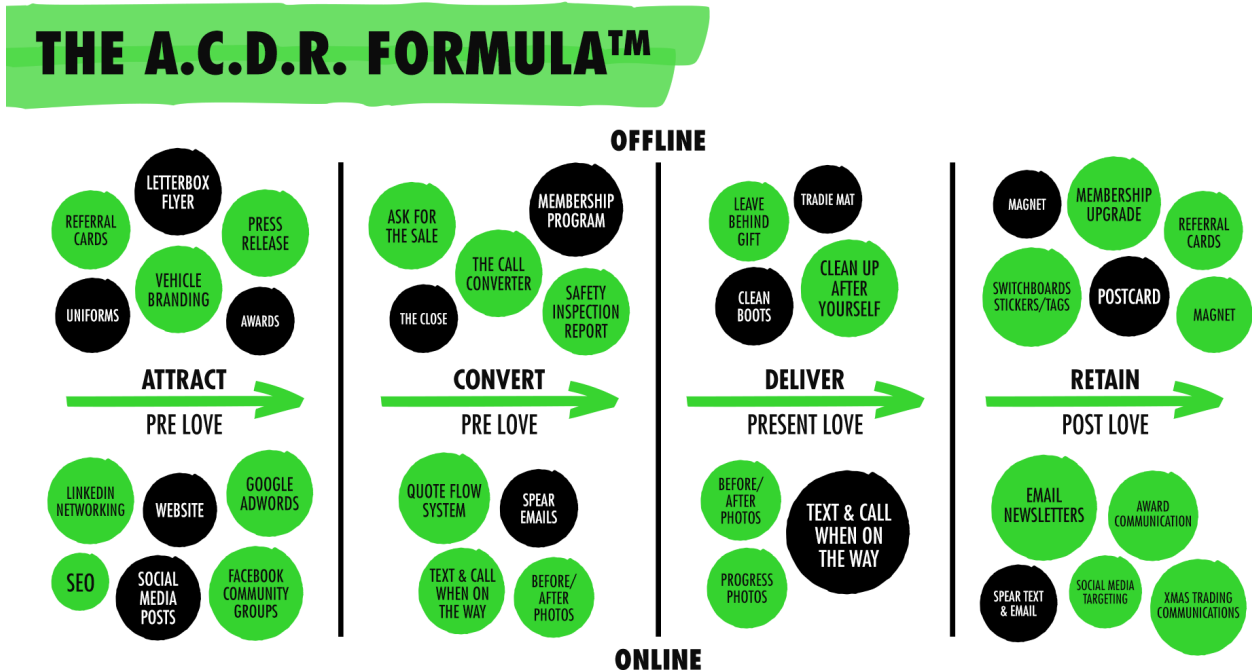
23. Ditch the vanity metrics

Quoting \$\$ revenue, #vehicles, #team might sound impressive, but don't kid yourself that these metrics are important. They don't prove your business is healthy. What matters is profit, cash flow, and how well your systems run. Stop measuring success by size alone. Focus on the numbers that show whether your business is actually making money and giving you control.



24. Marketing means more than leads

Getting the phone to ring is only the start. True marketing follows the A.C.D.R. Formula™: Attract, Convert, Deliver, Retain. You need to bring in the right customers, turn enquiries into jobs, deliver a great experience, and keep them coming back. Focus on all four stages, not just attracting work, to build a steady, profitable trade business.



25. Working harder will not fix a broken business model

Tradies often think more hustle = more money. But more hours just means more burnout. If your business model is broken, no quoting system, no pricing strategy, no staff accountability, working harder just makes the chaos worse.

What you need is a system: a repeatable way of operating that frees you up to work on the business, not just in it.

26. You can't do it all on your own

Too many trade business owners are stuck in the mindset that if you want it done right, do it yourself. But running solo, without systems or support, only leads to burnout.

When every decision, every job, every quote relies on you, you're not building a business, you're just surviving. A real business shares the load so you're not alone in the chaos. That's how you build something that lasts.

27. You don't need more leads, you need better conversions

Flooding your inbox with junk leads just keeps you busy. What you need is quality leads ... and a quoting process that converts.

Start by improving your sales process. The right customer is happy to pay... if they trust you.

28. Cash flow keeps you alive

Profit on paper won't save you if the money isn't in the bank. Late payments, slow invoicing, or poor tracking can sink a profitable business fast. Stay on top of billing, follow up debts, and plan for expenses so cash keeps moving. Healthy cash flow is what keeps the doors open and the team paid.

TURNOVER

is vanity.

PROFIT

is sanity.

CASH

is King.

29. Systems create freedom

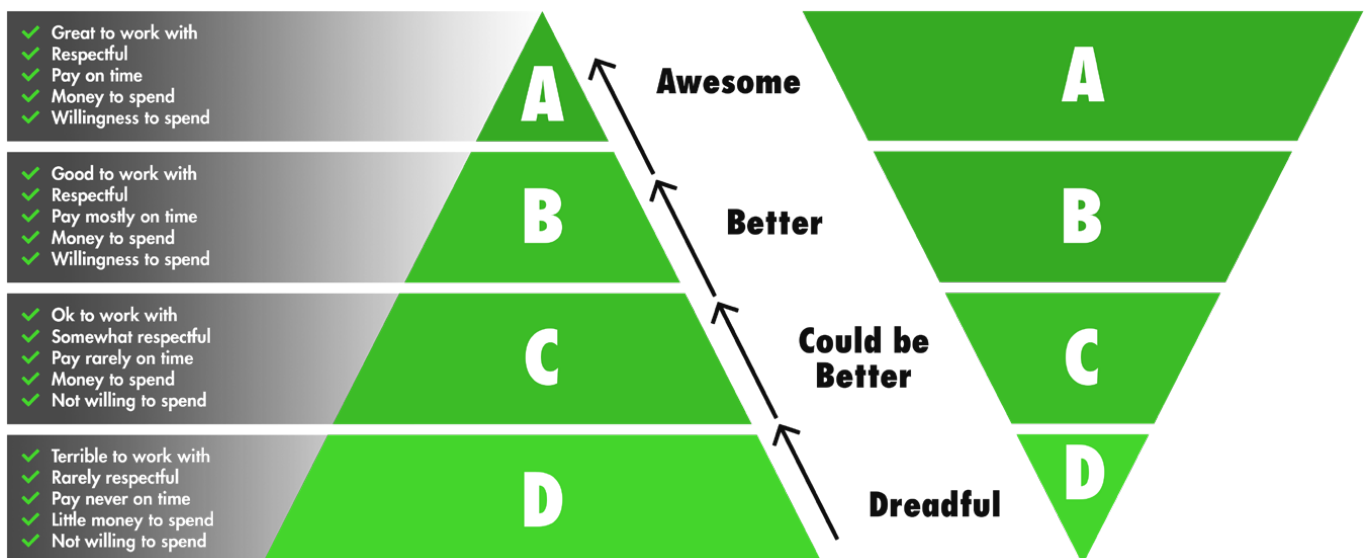
A business built on memory and guesswork will always feel chaotic. Documented systems - clear processes for quoting, scheduling, invoicing and more - keep work consistent and reduce mistakes. When everyone follows the same playbook, jobs run smoother, customers are happier, and you get back time to focus on growth instead of putting out fires.

30. You can fire customers (and you should!)

Not all jobs are worth doing. D-grade customers chew up time, question your pricing, and damage your reputation.

Spot them early. Say no. Focus your energy on A-grade customers who value your work and pay what you're worth.

A,B,C,D CUSTOMER TYPES™



31. Your business should run without you

You're allowed time off. But if your business stops earning the moment you walk away, that's a warning sign.

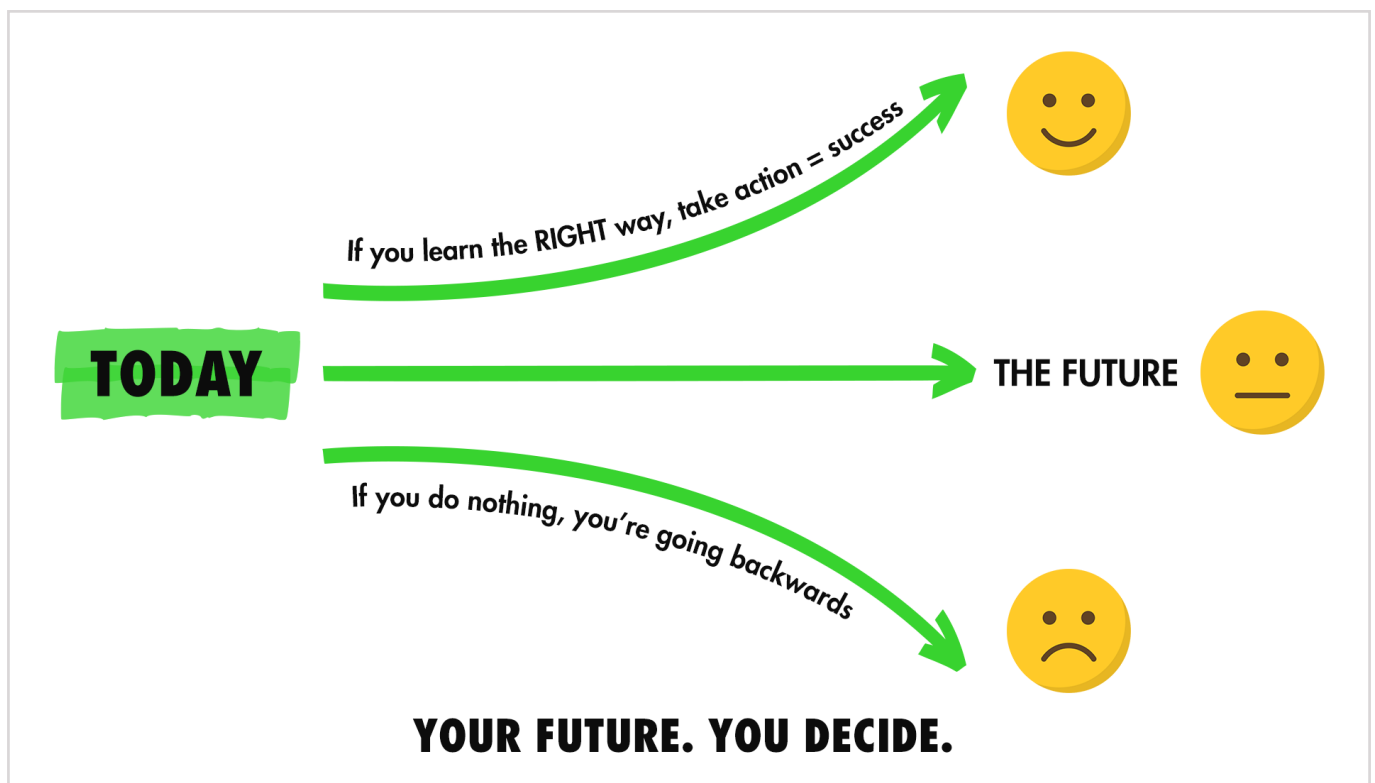
Set up systems that keep jobs moving, invoicing rolling, and your team working, even when you're away.

32. Confidence sells

People buy from those who believe in what they offer. When you speak with conviction about your service and price, customers feel it and trust follows. Confidence isn't arrogance; it's knowing your value and standing by it. Prepare well, know your numbers, and back your expertise. A confident tradie gives clients the assurance they need to say yes.

33. If you do nothing, you're going backwards

Your industry, technology, and customer expectations are always moving. If you're not learning, improving systems, or updating how you work, you're already slipping backwards. Keep an eye on trends, sharpen your skills, and adapt your business so you stay ahead of competitors and stay relevant to the customers you want to win.



34. Education is the key to freedom

Burying your head in the sand won't fix business problems. If you're not learning, you're not growing. Be a sponge, stay curious, pick up new skills, and put them into action. The more you learn and apply, the more freedom you create.

35. Doing your own bookkeeping isn't clever

Late-night number crunching in front of the TV leads to errors and stress. Your time is worth more on the tools. Hire a professional who costs less per hour than you and gets it right the first time.

36. Mindset sets the course

Running a trade business isn't just about tools and jobs, it's about how you think. A strong mindset keeps you focused when cash flow is tight, staff are tricky, or the phone won't stop ringing. Choose to see challenges as lessons and stay open to change. When you back yourself, take ownership, and believe in growth, you set the tone for your team and the future of your business.



37. You can't plug AI into a broken business model

If your systems are a mess, no technology will save you. Get your processes sorted now. AI is moving fast and will reshape the trade industry, but only those with a solid business model can use it to their advantage. Don't let competitors ride the wave while you're left behind.

38. Bigger is not always better

More work. More vans. More tradies. Sounds like progress, right?

Not if it's built on shaky foundations.

Growing without systems just scales chaos. You'll have more headaches, not more freedom.

39. You are not alone ... but you need to ask for help

You're not the only one feeling stuck, tired, or frustrated. But if you keep trying to figure it all out on your own, nothing changes.

There's a community of tradies out there who get it, and have turned their business around. You just need to reach out.



Quick Self-Check: Where's Your Business At?

Tick off what's true for you:

- ☐ I'm flat out but still broke
- ☐ I quote at night or on weekends
- ☐ I don't know my true profit margin
- ☐ I use job management software... 20-50% of it's capability.
- ☐ I'm undercharging (and I know it)
- ☐ I feel like I can't take a proper holiday
- ☐ I don't fully understand my numbers
- ☐ I don't follow up overdue invoices frequently enough
- ☐ I take on low-paying, painful customers
- ☐ I rely on referrals and discounts to win work
- ☐ My staff cut corners or go home early
- ☐ I've hired the wrong people just to keep up
- ☐ I have no idea what my staff actually cost me
- ☐ I don't lead the team — I just hope for the best
- ☐ My partner and I argue about the business
- ☐ I feel like the business bleeds into our home life
- ☐ I do the bookkeeping myself in front of the TV
- ☐ My "marketing" is guesswork at best
- ☐ I don't track conversion rates or customer quality
- ☐ I keep saying yes to jobs I should say no to
- ☐ I don't measure anything, I just go off gut feel

- ☐ I say I'll get help "later"... but nothing changes
- ☐ I've built a business that depends completely on me
- ☐ I get nervous when I think about taking time off
- ☐ I don't train my team — I just expect them to know
- ☐ I give pay rises with no real expectations set
- ☐ I have no real strategy — I just do what's urgent
- ☐ I chase every job instead of targeting the right ones
- ☐ I don't follow up overdue invoices frequently enough
- ☐ I feel busy but not in control
- ☐ I think AI is cool, but have no idea how to use it
- ☐ I haven't learned anything new in ages
- ☐ I don't send regular emails to my customer list
- ☐ I hate selling and avoid talking about price
- ☐ I'm not confident explaining my value
- ☐ I judge success by size, not profit or time freedom
- ☐ I say I want more control — but I don't act on it
- ☐ I know I should ask for help, but I haven't
- ☐ I feel like I've built myself a job — not a business

Score yourself:

- ☐ 1–13 ticks: You're doing OK, but cracks are forming
- ☐ 14–26 ticks: You're running hard but going in circles
- ☐ 27+ ticks: Mate, it's time for change... and fast

P.S. You're not alone. We've been there. If you're ready to fix the chaos and build a business that gives back time, profit, and freedom, we'll show you how.

Listen to the full episode of **The Tradie Show Podcast** where we unpack all 39 business secrets from this playbook, and reveal the stories behind them.



SEASON 17, EPISODE 11

**"THE \$1M+ TRADE BUSINESS PLAYBOOK
(THE STUFF NO ONE TELLS YOU)"**



Scan to listen instantly and take the next step toward a smarter, more profitable trade business.

REAL TRADIES, REAL RESULTS

“ We knew we needed to look at numbers, but we didn’t know which numbers to look at. Learning the right numbers to be watching, meant we were able to triple our business within two years. Knowing that you’ve got other people in the community that are going through the same thing as you are, and seeing how they deal with it, is invaluable.”

— Kieren & Tayla O'Brien, Lexity Plumbing & Electrical (VIC)



“ Lifestyle Tradie has helped me over the past few years to increase my revenue 4x. The tools and education the team provides to its members allows us to set our own destiny, together with the motivation and resources to improve our mindset means the only excuse to not succeed is ourselves.

I no longer work 100 hours a week, I barely work 40 hours anymore. I have holidays with my family and I get to be with my family for all the milestones and big moments in life. Now I get to start working on my exit strategies all of which Lifestyle Tradie have the tools for me to achieve.

Thank You Andy, Ange and the entire team for putting in the hard work for all your members (and followers) so we can have the lifestyle we all dreamed about, when we quit our jobs from the man and slapped a sign on the side of the vehicle.

— Paul Wicks - Unique Project Group (ACT)



“ We were hitting a brick wall in our business. We fought all the time and I was doing quotes and admin till all hours of the night. I was constantly on the phone, during dinner, on weekends, missing family time. We didn’t have any work/life balance. It was just WORK, WORK, WORK. We had no systems in place and phone calls & messages coming in from everywhere. We missed good opportunities because we weren’t organised.

Since joining Lifestyle Tradie we’ve gone from three employees to a team of 12 and Ash has formally joined the business. Our turnover has gone from \$400K to just over \$2-million ... and our hours have gone from 80hrs p/week down to 40 hours p/week. I now have a great work/life balance. I finish work at 3:30pm and I’ve got my weekends back and enjoy spending time with the family.

— Jamie & Ashley Cairns - Reliable Roofing & Maintenance (SA)



“ We started with two plumbers and were turning over a couple hundred thousand. There was no profit in the business and my day was chaos. Fast forward, we are now a team of 8 turning over \$1-million+ with a healthy profit margin. Knowing my numbers has been the game changer! Getting help to understand the specific numbers required to measure success in a trade business and set targets, has given me a level of confidence that I never had before. Thanks Lifestyle Tradie.

— Damian Connor - Evermore Plumbing & Gas (QLD)



WHAT'S NEXT?

You're the one wearing the heavy load of responsibility - and suffering major stress.
Find out how we can help further...



LISTEN TO...



This podcast is about having conversations on topics that matter to tradies, tradie wives, and partners who want to be better at business. You'll hear expert tips, step-by-step trade business strategies, insights and the occasional rant!

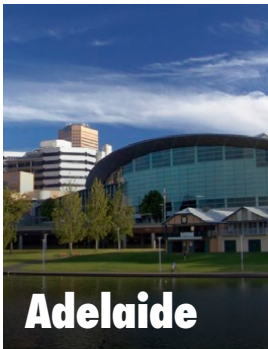
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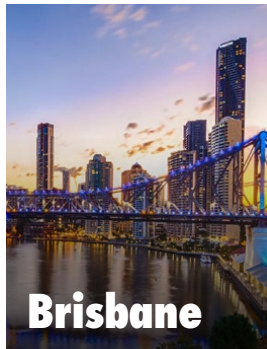
**1-DAY LIVE EVENT FOR
TRADE BUSINESS OWNERS**



Perth



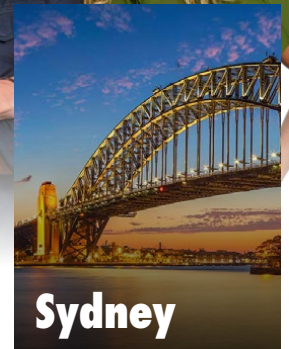
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