

The Art of Making Honey

Bill Canady

Day Zero

Write a one-sentence plan, assess where you stand, and identify what you still need to know.

A complete working section from the released fillable PDF edition.
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Original page numbers are retained in the excerpt.
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This guide refers to a work of fiction. The hive, its bees, its customers and its suppliers are invented. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual businesses, is coincidental. Every figure used as an example comes from that story and is illustrative.

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Day Zero

Where you actually are, before you decide where you are going.

Everybody is at Day Zero until they have a plan.

That is not a motivational line. A leader without a plan is not on day four hundred of anything. They are on Day Zero, and they will stay there, collecting information, holding meetings and managing the noise, until they decide where the business is going and write it down.

The clock is the other half of it. It did not start when you took the job. It started when the investment was made, or the day somebody first said out loud that something was wrong, and it has not stopped since. It will not stop while you get up to speed. **Getting up to speed is your problem, not the company's.** Day Zero is the distance between the day the clock started and the day you have a plan, and every day you spend there the company spends too.

The good news is the part people miss. If Day Zero is a condition and not a date, you can leave it whenever you decide to. First week or eleventh year, it does not matter. The clock will not wait for you. It also does not care how late you start.



Figure 2. The number on one line — the hive's colony count. Fifty-eight thousand two years ago, forty-one thousand this morning, a hundred thousand in a comb built for it. One figure, three dates, and no argument about what it means.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS MISSING

Your calendar is full and you could not say what any of it decided. Your leaders are working hard on things you did not choose. Three different versions of the priority list exist and all three are defensible.

Somebody asks what the plan is and four people answer differently, and everybody in the room hears it happen and says nothing.

The tell is the answer to *what are we trying to do this year*. If it takes more than one sentence, or if it takes a slide, you are at Day Zero.

IN THE STORY

Bea walks into a board meeting and is told, third thing, that the hive is dying. She is given fifty-six days. She has no plan, no chair at the table, and a management team she has not met.

She does not produce a plan that day, or the next. She listens for two days, to everyone, and writes almost nothing. On the third day the team builds the plan together, and that is the day her clock starts: day forty-seven of the hundred. Forty-four of those were spent before she arrived, by other bees, and two more went on the listening. She does not get any of them back.

The listening was not lost time. Every one of the five people she spoke to told her something was broken, and the engineer told her nothing was broken, which turned out to be the worst news in the building. But it came out of the fifty-six, not out of nowhere.

WORKSHEET ONE — THE CLOCK

Dates, not feelings. If nobody has told you, write what you believe and mark it as a belief.

QUESTION	DATE	HOW DO YOU KNOW
When did this company's clock start? The investment, the acquisition, the covenant, the day somebody named the problem.		
When does it end? The exit window, the maturity, the season, the day the money runs out.		
What is the first date after today that somebody outside this company is expecting something from you?		

Days already spent, and by whom.

Days remaining. Write the number, not the phrase.

WORKSHEET TWO — THE DAY ZERO ASSESSMENT

Mark each one honestly. A flattering answer costs you the whole exercise. Score 1 for yes, 0 for no or not sure. Not sure is a no.

	STATEMENT	1 / 0
1	I can state where this business is going, and by when, in one sentence.	
2	At least three other people here could say that sentence back to me today, unprompted.	
3	I can name my top twenty customers by profit, without asking anyone.	
4	I know what it costs us to serve our smallest hundred accounts.	
5	I know which of our products we would not launch if we were deciding today.	
6	There is a meeting every week that would tell me early if this was going wrong.	
7	Somebody in this company is expected to tell me what I do not want to hear, and did so in the last month.	
8	Everyone here knows the date that matters, and what happens if we miss it.	
9	I know what we are going to stop doing, and who owns stopping it.	
10	I have written any of the above down, somewhere other than in my own notes.	
	TOTAL	

Eight or more and you are past Day Zero. Use this guide to sharpen. Four to seven and you have half a plan, which is the most dangerous number, because it feels like one. Three or fewer and you are at Day Zero, whatever the calendar says. That is not a judgment. It is the most common answer.

WORKSHEET THREE — YOUR PLAN IN ONE SENTENCE

Where the business is going, and by when. Write it badly first. Then write it again.

First attempt.

Now cut it. Remove every word that could appear in any other company's sentence.

Who could say that back to you today, unprompted? Names.

What are you spending your weeks on that is not in that sentence?

WORKSHEET FOUR — WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW

This is the most useful page in the chapter. Every blank you left above goes here, with a name and a date against it. Nothing on this list is allowed to still be blank when you reach Phase Four.

WHAT WE CANNOT ANSWER	WHO FINDS OUT	BY

RUNNING THIS WITH A TEAM

Ninety minutes. Everyone completes the assessment alone, on paper, before anybody speaks. No exceptions, and no discussion while they do it. Then read out the totals with no commentary. The spread matters more than the average: if your CFO scores nine and your operations lead scores three, you do not have a scoring problem, you have two companies.

Take the statements one at a time. For each one where the room split, ask the person who scored zero to speak first. They are almost always right, and they are the reason you are running this.

Close by filling in Worksheet 4 together. Do not leave the room without a name and a date on every line.

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK ON MONDAY

- 1. What is the date that is actually coming for us, and who else in the building knows it?
- 2. What have I been treating as a plan that is actually a goal?

3. What is on my calendar this week that does not appear anywhere in my one sentence?

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

You have written a date the clock started and a date it ends. You have a one-sentence plan, however rough. You have a list of things nobody here can answer, each with a name and a date. **Your Day One begins when those three exist. Not before.**