

Remodeling a company you didn't build.



What is different about remodeling a company you did not build?

Remodeling an inherited company is different from building one from scratch because you are responsible for the future without owning the past.

You inherit decisions that have already been made. Relationships that have been earned. Habits that quietly keep the business moving. A team watching to see whether you understand any of it.

The job is not demolition.

It is renovation.

You need to know which walls are load-bearing before you move them. In an inherited business, a load-bearing wall is any relationship, agreement, process, person, or piece of trust that supports the business more than it appears to.

It may be:

- A customer relationship no report fully captures
- Supplier terms negotiated over many years
- Institutional knowledge held by one person
- A sales habit that works because the team understands the market
- Trust between a brand and its channel
- A process created to solve a real problem that newer leaders no longer remember

Name those pieces before you renovate.

Changing the wrong structural element can cost more than any new initiative earns.

I have worked across companies and industries where the assignment was not to start over. It was to understand what had been built, decide what still served the business, and move the company toward a stronger position.

That requires judgment.

It also requires restraint.

What should you do in the first ninety days?

The first ninety days are for understanding what is true, not proving that you arrived with answers.

I begin with the economics of the business. Where does revenue really come from? Which customers are profitable? Which products or services carry the margin? Which channels create repeatable demand? Where does cash get delayed or lost?

Then I look at the operating system around those numbers:

- Customer concentration
- Margin by offering
- Sales activity and conversion
- Retention and renewal behavior
- Pipeline quality
- Team capacity
- Reporting accuracy
- Decision rights
- Supplier and distributor dependencies
- Processes that slow execution

I do not only speak with the leadership team.

I talk to the people in the field. The people who answer customer calls. The people who ship the work. The people who see where a promise breaks down before it appears in a report.

The front line usually knows first.

They know which customers are frustrated. They know which internal process no longer makes sense. They know which product is difficult to sell and which one customers quietly request by name. They know who holds the relationships. They know where the company is performing well despite the system, rather than because of it.

That information matters.

A leadership room can tell you what the business is supposed to do. The field tells you what it actually does.

How do you identify the load-bearing walls?

Load-bearing walls are the relationships, agreements, people, and operating habits that hold the business up even when they are not visible on an organizational chart.

I look for them before making significant changes.

Sometimes the wall is a long-standing customer who gives the company credibility in a market. Sometimes it is a local sales leader who understands how decisions really get made. Sometimes it is a supplier agreement that protects margin. Sometimes it is a person who can solve a difficult operational problem in one conversation.

You do not discover these things by rearranging a slide deck.

You discover them by asking careful questions and listening for what people repeat.

What would break if we removed this?

Who would feel the impact first?

What problem was this process designed to solve?

Which promises has the company made that customers still expect it to keep?

The answers create a map.

Without that map, change becomes theater. You move pieces because movement is visible. The business becomes busier without becoming better.

Why should a new leader respect what already works?

A new leader's instinct is often to replace the previous leader's work to signal change. That is usually ego, not strategy.

I assume previous decisions had a reason.

The reason may no longer be valid. The market may have changed. The customer may have changed. The company may have outgrown the structure. But I want someone to prove the reason is gone before I remove the decision.

This does not mean preserving everything.

It means understanding before judging.

A process that looks inefficient may have protected quality during a difficult period. A product that appears less important may create the relationship that leads to a larger sale. A conservative channel strategy may have been the right response to regulatory or operational constraints.

Respect is not agreement.

It is the discipline to understand what you are changing.

How do trust, loyalty, and transparency support change?

Trust is built by telling the truth early and keeping small promises consistently.

You cannot remodel a company with a team that does not trust your judgment or your intentions. People may comply for a while. They will not commit.

I build trust by being direct about what I know, what I do not know yet, and what I am going to find out. I explain what will change. I explain what will not change. When the answer is uncomfortable, I do not make it softer than it is.

Transparency does not mean sharing every unresolved thought. It means making the reasoning visible when a decision affects other people.

Loyalty works the same way.

People are more willing to support a new version of the company when they understand why it should win and where their contributions fit in that future. They need to know what will survive. They need to know what they are being asked to build.

Trust.

Loyalty.

Transparency.

These are not culture statements. They are operating tools.

They appear in clear ownership, honest timelines, named decisions, and follow-through.

How do you stay calm when the business is changing?

I love change because it creates the possibility of a better position.

I do not love unnecessary chaos.

Remodeling is loud. Priorities compete. People worry about their roles. Customers notice inconsistency. Some decisions become urgent before the information is complete.

The leader has to be the least panicked person in the building.

Calm is not passivity. It is a discipline of reducing chaos to the next decision.

What matters now?

Who owns it?

What does done look like?

When will we review the result?

Those questions create movement without pretending the entire future is known.

I have learned to communicate steadily while the dust is still in the air. People do not need a leader who claims everything is fine. They need one who can say what is difficult, identify the next move, and remain present while the work gets done.

How does failing faster create a better pivot?

Failing faster does not mean acting recklessly. It means testing an assumption before the company spends too much time, money, or credibility defending it.

Inherited plans are often bets someone else made and never fully tested. Some deserve to continue. Others need to end.

Before starting an initiative, I want to know:

- What would have to be true for this to work?
- What evidence would show early movement?
- When is the first meaningful checkpoint?
- Who owns the result?
- What will we do if the evidence says no?

The checkpoint must come early enough to matter.

If a campaign is not reaching the right audience, change it. If a channel partner is not prioritizing the business, address it. If a product or service is not earning its place, stop protecting it because it has history.

The expensive failure is the slow one.

A contained failure can create a useful pivot. An unexamined failure becomes a habit, a budget line, and eventually a political argument.

I would rather learn quickly and change direction than remain loyal to a plan that no longer deserves loyalty.

What does it mean to move the chess pieces?

Remodeling is largely a matter of placement.

You put the right person on the right problem. You move budget from the program that no longer earns its place to the one that does. You change which channel leads. You adjust the message. You protect the core business while opening a line for growth.

The order matters.

One move creates the conditions for the next.



Sometimes the first move is unglamorous. Clarify ownership. Fix reporting. Repair a customer hand-off. Give a capable person authority that was previously trapped in layers of approval.

That move may not look like transformation.

It may be the move that makes transformation possible.

My approach is to think several moves ahead while remaining accountable for the move in front of us. Protect the revenue that pays the bills. Create room for a new position. Prove movement quickly. Then remodel the larger system around what the evidence has earned.

What sequence makes an inherited business stronger?

The practical sequence is simple, although the work is not.

1. **Stabilize** the business and protect customer commitments.
2. **Understand** the economics, relationships, people, and operating reality.
3. **Protect what works** by naming the load-bearing walls.
4. **Build trust** through transparency, consistency, and visible follow-through.
5. **Choose the position** the company needs to earn in the market.
6. **Make the first placement moves** across people, budget, channels, and priorities.
7. **Prove movement quickly** with one visible improvement in the first ninety days.
8. **Remodel the larger system** once the direction has credibility.

That early win matters.

It should be real, measurable, and connected to the company's future. A repaired customer experience. A clearer sales process. A reporting layer people can use. A stalled initiative resolved. One visible improvement can create the credibility needed for harder changes later.

Not because the company needs a performance.

Because people need evidence.

What does it mean for a leader to need to win?

The need to win is the engine of the renovation.

Not the need to be praised. Not the need to prove the previous version was wrong. The need to move the company in the right direction and keep moving until the position improves.

Winning may mean stronger margins, better retention, a more capable team, or a clearer place in the market. It may mean making the business less dependent on one person. The best outcome is not that the leader becomes indispensable.

It is that the company can keep winning without her.

That requires ambition and humility at the same time.

You need enough ambition to reject "this is just how we do it." You need enough humility to recognize that the company existed before you and should continue after you.

The credit belongs to the team that did the work.

I do not need the credit.

I need the business to move.

When is remodeling the wrong answer?

Sometimes the honest answer is that the company needs a different operator, a sale, or a much smaller scope.

A leader who says that plainly may be more valuable than one who promises a turnaround regardless of the evidence.

Not every business needs to be expanded. Not every problem can be solved through better positioning or stronger execution. Sometimes the responsible decision is to narrow the ambition, protect the people and customers who matter, and stop funding a future the business cannot support.

That is not failure.

That is judgment.

Remodeling is not about making a company look new.

It is about making it stronger, clearer, and more capable of carrying its own future.

If you are facing that kind of transition, a quiet conversation can clarify what should be protected, what should change, and what the next move needs to be. Start the conversation.

The work should speak through the company's success.

Not through the person who remodeled it.

