

THE CEO'S

Unexpected

FIELD GUIDE

10 Lessons CEOs Don't Expect to
Need—But Can't Lead Without



Introduction

Being CEO comes with the usual suspects: strategy, culture, capital, talent. But there's another category—the hidden, less-talked-about practices that quietly make you better at all of them. Here's the shortlist that veteran CEOs swear by (after learning the hard way).

1

Schedule Thinking Time Like It's a Board Meeting

You won't magically "find time" to think strategically—your calendar will eat it alive. Book two hours a week with no agenda except stepping back from the noise.

2

Keep a “Regret Ledger”

Log decisions that didn’t work out and why. Review quarterly. Over time, you’ll see patterns in your blind spots—and avoid expensive repeats.

3

Write Your Own Obituary for the Company

If your business failed five years from now, what would the headline be? It forces you to surface risks that feel distant but are already forming.

4

Ask for One Brutal Truth a Month

From your exec team, board, or even a customer
—something they think you don't want to hear.
The sooner you hear it, the cheaper it is to fix.

5

Run a Shadow Board

Invite a rotating group of high-potential leadership team members to weigh in on strategy before the real board meeting. You'll see how your decisions play at the ground level.

6

Audit Your Time by Strategic Value

Track your calendar for two weeks. Code each activity: Growth, Risk, Talent, Admin. Then ruthlessly cut or delegate low-value buckets.

7

Keep a “Break Glass” Succession Binder

If you vanish for a month, the company should run without missing a beat. If it can't, you're the single point of failure.

8

Pre-Mortem Every Major Initiative

Before launch, gather your team and ask, “Imagine this failed—what went wrong?” The answers will save you millions and months.

9

Script the First Five Minutes of Every Board Meeting

Your opening sets the tone. Use it to frame the strategic focus, establish priorities, and direct attention toward decisions, not distractions.

10

Script the Last 10 Minutes of Every Board Meeting

End with decisions, commitments, and clear ownership—so momentum leaves the room with everyone, not just you.