

A black and white portrait of Olivier Giraud, a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a light-colored zip-up sweater over a collared shirt. The background is a solid red color with a dark red geometric shape in the top right corner.

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OLIVIER GIRAUDO

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Hard **Work** Isn't the Problem
Misplaced **Effort** Is!

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Many small business owners generating under \$100,000 a year believe their main challenge is a lack of effort. They feel exhausted, overwhelmed, and stretched thin. Long days turn into long weeks, and yet revenue barely moves. This creates frustration and, eventually, self-doubt. If they are working this hard, why does growth still feel so far away?

The uncomfortable truth is this: most small business owners are not failing because they are lazy. They are failing because their effort is being applied in the wrong direction. Hard work alone does not build a business. Strategic effort does.

At the early stages of a business, effort must be ruthless in its focus. Anything that does not directly or indirectly lead to revenue is secondary. Yet many owners spend the majority of their time perfecting details that have little impact on growth. They tweak logos, redesign websites, reorganize systems, and consume endless information, all while avoiding the activities that actually move the business forward.

Misplaced effort feels productive because it is safe. It keeps you busy without forcing you into uncomfortable situations. Selling, following up, asking for commitments, and putting yourself in front of potential customers carry emotional risk. They invite rejection, silence, and judgment. As a result, many owners unconsciously replace revenue-generating actions with tasks that feel productive but carry no real consequence.

This is how businesses stay small while owners work harder than ever.

Effort must be measured not by time spent, but by outcomes produced. A full day does not mean a productive day if no conversations were started and no offers were made. Revenue responds to exposure and decisiveness, not to how tired you feel at the end of the day.

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Another common mistake is prioritizing efficiency too early. Many business owners try to optimize processes before they have momentum. They attempt to save time in a business that has not yet earned the right to be efficient. At this stage, speed and volume matter far more than optimization. It is better to take imperfect action repeatedly than to design perfect systems that support very little activity.

Effort also becomes misplaced when owners confuse learning with progress. Education has value, but information without execution creates the illusion of growth. Reading another book, watching another video, or attending another webinar does not change revenue unless it leads to immediate action. Businesses do not grow because their owners know more; they grow because their owners do more with what they already know.

Selling is often where misplaced effort is most visible. Many small business owners treat selling as something that should happen naturally if the product or service is good enough. They wait for interest instead of creating it. They hope for inbound leads instead of actively reaching out. This passive approach keeps revenue unpredictable and low.

At under \$100,000 in revenue, selling must be intentional and frequent. Conversations must be initiated, not awaited. Follow-ups must be persistent, not optional. Offers must be made clearly and confidently. Without this, even the best product will struggle to gain traction.

Misplaced effort also shows up in how time is allocated. Many owners spend their best hours on administrative tasks and leave revenue-generating activities for later, when energy is low. This guarantees inconsistent execution. Growth requires placing the most important actions first, not fitting them in after everything else is done.

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The businesses that break through early revenue ceilings do not necessarily work longer hours. They work with sharper focus. They understand that not all effort is equal and that some actions are worth more than others.

They are willing to eliminate tasks that do not contribute to growth, even if those tasks feel familiar or comfortable.

Correcting misplaced effort requires honesty. It requires asking whether daily actions are aligned with revenue goals or simply filling time. It requires letting go of the idea that being busy is proof of progress. Most importantly, it requires a willingness to do the uncomfortable work consistently.

Growth rewards effort that creates pressure. Pressure to be visible. Pressure to follow up. Pressure to ask for decisions. Without that pressure, businesses drift, regardless of how hard their owners feel they are working.

Hard work is not the enemy. Misalignment is. When effort is redirected toward actions that generate revenue, clarity improves, momentum builds, and confidence follows. Results begin to appear not because effort increased, but because effort finally mattered.

If your business feels stuck despite long hours, the answer is not more effort. It is better effort. Focused effort. Revenue-driven effort. That shift alone can change the trajectory of your business faster than any new idea or strategy.

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