



The Goldilocks Operating Model

Finding the Rhythm That Is Just Right

By Claudia McIntyre

In my own experience as a business leader and owner, I have often felt like I was given the opportunity to play Goldilocks. Across roles, industries, and seasons of growth, I was able to observe what worked, what did not, and adjust in real time toward a set of proven best practices.

If you learned about Goldilocks in childhood, you may remember the story. She wanders into the house of the Three Bears while they are away. She tries their porridge. One is too hot, one too cold, and one is just right. She tries their chairs with the same result. The pattern repeats again with their beds.

The lesson is simple. Extremes do not work. What works is the middle ground that fits the situation. Not perfect, but appropriate.

I have found that across businesses, industries, and leadership styles, this same principle applies to operating cadence.

Why strong teams still feel frustrated

I often work with leadership teams that are capable, committed, and working hard. These are not broken teams by any means. And yet, they are frustrated and feel like they are spinning their wheels in important areas.

When asked where the frustration is coming from, the answers are usually reasonable. A difficult customer issue. Broader economic pressure. An employee performance or responsiveness challenge that feels stuck. Some of these issues are within the team's control. Others are not.

What surprises leaders is that regardless of the source, there is a way to work through these situations decisively and reduce ongoing frustration. The difference is not effort or intent. It is how the organization processes issues, sets priorities, and follows through.

That is where operating cadence brings a momentum.

The Goldilocks principle applied to operating cadence

When planning and communication are too loose, leaders are pulled into constant reaction. Frustration grows because nothing ever quite feels settled. When structure is too rigid or excessive, teams lose autonomy. Energy is spent managing process instead of driving results.

The balance, the “just right,” shows up through a simple, repeatable rhythm.

- **Annual planning** sets direction and defines what success looks like for the business in the year ahead. It creates shared clarity around priorities and tradeoffs so leaders are not revisiting the same decisions repeatedly
- **Quarterly goal setting** translates that direction into focus. It allows teams to adjust for reality, recalibrate resources, and stay aligned as conditions change
- **Monthly one-on-one check-ins** support accountability, growth, and alignment. They give leaders a consistent way to understand what matters to each person, how their role connects to where they are headed, and whether expectations are clear. Over time, these conversations surface issues early, strengthen ownership, and ensure development keeps pace with performance
- **Consistent weekly team meetings with a repeatable agenda, where everyone comes prepared and accountable**

Anchored by clear measures of success for the business, the team, and the individual, this cadence keeps execution on track. Progress becomes visible. Priorities stay front and center. Problems are communicated and addressed before they compound.

Together, this operating rhythm provides a practical guide. Not too much structure. Not too little. Just enough to help strong teams stay focused, reduce frustration, and move forward decisively.

That is the Goldilocks operating model.

An added note on daily discipline

Daily structure does not belong in the operating model itself. It belongs with the individual leader. A simple, private habit helps leaders stay focused between weekly and monthly rhythms.

Personal daily priorities check

- What matters most today
- What must move forward
- What cannot be avoided

This is not a meeting or a report. It is a discipline leaders use to maintain clarity and momentum without adding unnecessary structure.