079 The Repairman Fallacy

Perspective Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/079-the-repairman-fallacy/

When you fix something, you feel productive. You identified a problem. You addressed it. You can see the result. That registers as leadership — and in the moment, it is.

But here's what it isn't: progress.

A fix returns you to where you were before it broke. That's the ceiling on a repair. You haven't built anything new. You haven't moved the business forward. You've recovered ground you already had.

Alan Weiss, one of the most respected voices in consulting, put it plainly: when you fix something, you return to zero. I've spent more than four decades watching operators pour their energy into getting back to zero and calling it progress.

The Repairman Fallacy is what happens when the satisfaction of the fix becomes the operating strategy. Operators who live in repair mode are always busy. They're always solving something. And at the end of every week, they're right back where they started. Not because they didn't work. Because the work they chose only ever goes back to zero.

Fixing is necessary. Things break. Standards slip. People leave. You have to address it. But if fixing is your entire operating strategy — if every week is just a new list of things to repair — you will never build anything. You'll be the most competent repairman in your market and you'll still lose to the operator who was busy building while you were busy fixing.

Growth doesn't come from fixing what's broken. Growth comes from building what doesn't exist yet.

And there is no standing still. Motion happens one way or the other — forward or backward — whether you intend it or not. The restaurant that isn't actively moving forward is moving backward. Guests are evolving, competitors are moving, the market is shifting. The operator who thinks they've found a plateau is already on a decline they haven't noticed yet.

Fixing makes you a repairman. Next practices make you a builder. Decide which one you are.

What Changes Tomorrow

Tomorrow, before you celebrate fixing a problem, remember that fixing only returns you to zero — it isn't progress. Name one thing you could build that doesn't exist yet in your operation, and put real time against that instead of just more repairs.