

**THE NEW
TALENT
PLAYBOOK**
Podcast

Action Kit

**Why "Good Enough"
is Standing in the
Way of Your Growth**

Featuring Karen Caplan

Episode 4 - Season 6

By Rob Levin, Creator of thenewtalentplaybookpodcast.com
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You just listened to Karen Kaplan, former CEO of Frieda's Specialty Produce and founder of an executive coaching and consulting firm, share the leadership lessons she's gathered across 30 years of running a company and now coaching CEOs. Karen reveals that most business owners are stuck working in their business instead of on it, lack real accountability, and shy away from the kind of bold "yes" moments that create the biggest breakthroughs. Whether you're navigating growth, building culture, or rethinking how you lead your team, this playbook gives you the tools to act on what you just heard.

1. Stop Working In Your Business, Start Working On It

Karen's number one finding with every CEO client is this: they are so consumed by day-to-day operations that they never carve out time for vision, strategy, and planning. The result? Growth stalls, blind spots multiply, and the business runs the owner, not the other way around. Recognizing which mode you're in is the first step to changing it.

Time Audit: Where Does Your Week Actually Go? For the last 5 business days, estimate how many hours you spent in each category:

Activity Type	Hrs/Day (Est.)	Total Hrs (Week)
Reactive tasks (emails, fires, day-to-day ops)		
Team management & meetings		
Client/customer work		
Strategy, planning & vision		
Learning, coaching, or self-development		

Reflection: What is the ONE strategic task you've been putting off because you've been too busy "in" the business?

2. You Have to Really Want It, The Discipline of Focused Goals

Karen broke her arm and spent 10 weeks in intense recovery, not because she had to, but because she desperately wanted to get back to normal. She draws a direct parallel to business: many owners say they want growth but get distracted by the urgent and comfortable. Real progress requires the discipline to stay focused on what matters most, even when the status quo feels acceptable.

"Want It" Assessment:

Rate yourself honestly on each statement (1 = Not at all, 5 = Absolutely):

Statement	Score (1-5)
I have a clearly defined goal for my business this year.	
I protect dedicated time weekly to work toward that goal.	
I have concrete deadlines for my top priorities.	
I am not distracted by comfortable "good enough" results.	
I hold myself accountable even when no one is watching.	

Your Lowest Score: That's the first area to address. What's one specific action you'll take on it this week?

Commitment Checkpoint:

Write down one goal you claim to want but haven't actively pursued. Then answer honestly:

Goal: _____

Why haven't I pursued it?

Do I really want it? (circle one):

YES, I'm committed / No, I should stop pretending I am

3. Say Yes More, A Growth Mindset in Action

Karen believes that saying "yes" is one of the clearest signals of a growth mindset. When a speaking engagement, a trade of services, or a connection request arrives, people with a fixed mindset find reasons to say no. People with a growth mindset ask: "How can I make this work?" Karen's own experience trading coaching services for AI coaching is a perfect example: she said yes and gained a skill that now makes her a better advisor to every client.

Growth vs. Fixed Mindset Audit:

Think of the last 3 times someone asked you for something (a favor, collaboration, speaking, introduction).

Check all that apply:

- I said yes and something unexpectedly positive came from it.
- I said no because I was "too busy" — but in hindsight, I could have made it work.
- I said no and missed a connection or opportunity I later regretted.
- I said yes but only after a lot of internal resistance and excuses.
- I have a default habit of saying yes to new people and new ideas.

The "How Can I Make This Work?" Practice:

Think of one opportunity or request you recently declined. Reframe it:

The ask was: _____

My reason for saying no: _____

How could I have made it work? _____

What might have come from it? _____

Your Yes Commitment:

Name one upcoming opportunity you've been hesitant about. Commit to saying yes:

4. Ditch the Annual Review, Lead Like a Coach, Not a Judge

Annual performance reviews are outdated. Karen argues they're backward-looking, compensation-focused, and miss what employees actually need: ongoing feedback, real conversations, and a leader who genuinely wants to help them grow. She recommends replacing the once-a-year ritual with consistent, employee-driven one-on-ones built around four powerful coaching questions.

Karen's 4 Coaching Questions (use in every one-on-one):

1. What's working well right now for you?
2. Where are you feeling stuck or frustrated?
3. What support do you need from me right now?
4. What are you currently learning?

Your One-on-One Readiness Checklist:

- I schedule consistent one-on-ones with every direct report (bi-weekly or monthly).
- I let the employee drive the agenda — it's not just a status update.
- I take notes on paper (not a laptop) to show full presence.
- I follow up on what was discussed at the last meeting.
- I close with clarity: "What can I do to help you succeed?"

Practice Run:

Pick one team member. Schedule a 30-minute one-on-one this week and use Karen's 4 questions. After the meeting, reflect:

Team member: _____

Most surprising thing they shared: _____

Action I committed to taking: _____

How did it feel to coach vs. judge? _____

5. Culture Is a CEO Function, Build It Intentionally

Karen learned this firsthand: culture doesn't change through HR memos or mission statement rewrites. It changes with every single hire you make and every behavior you model as the leader. If you say one thing and do another, you don't just confuse people — you damage trust. As a business owner, you are the culture. The good news? That means you have the power to change it, one decision at a time.

Culture Self-Assessment:

Rate how consistently you demonstrate each cultural value (1 = Rarely, 5 = Always):

Cultural Behavior	Score (1-5)
I do what I say I'm going to do, when I say I'll do it.	
I am curious and openly learning new things (e.g., AI, new tools).	
I model the behavior I want from my team.	
I involve the right people in decisions and give credit generously.	
I hire people who elevate the culture, not just fill a seat.	

Your Next Hire as a Culture Moment:

Think about your next open role. Answer these:

Role: _____

What cultural quality does my team currently lack?

How will I intentionally screen for that in the hiring process?

“Someone on the outside can hold up that mirror and say, ‘This is not working’, and sometimes that’s the most important thing anyone will ever do for your business.”

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