

11 Principles for Building a Trade Business That Runs Without You

ERIKA ENTZ

TRADE LIKE A VIKING™

THE VIKING CODE™

*11 Principles for Building a Trade Business
That Runs Without You*

Stop building a job. Start building a legacy.

ERIKA ENTZ

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Published by Erika Entz
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ISBN 978-1-7644699-5-1 (paperback)

First published 2026

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The stories in this book are drawn from the author's twenty years of consulting experience around the world. Unless explicitly stated, all business stories are composite accounts constructed to represent real patterns. No single business or individual is depicted. Any resemblance to a specific business or person is unintentional.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Author's Note	xi
PART ONE: THE FOUNDATION	17
I Plan the Voyage	19
II Build Strong Ships	29
III Trust the Crew	43
PART TWO: THE OPERATIONS	57
IV Adapt to the Storm	59
V Protect the Village	71
VI Explore New Lands	85
PART THREE: THE EXCELLENCE	95
VII Trade with Honour	97
VIII Respect the Tools	109
IX Learn from Every Voyage	127
PART FOUR: THE LEGACY	141
X Leave a Legacy	143
XI Know Your Why	153
The Viking Declaration	163
Appendix A: The Viking Code Operational Audit	167
Appendix B: The Viking Code Toolkit	173
Appendix C: The 90-Day Viking Blueprint	177
References	179
About the Author	183

AUTHOR'S NOTE

How This Book Was Born

I was eighteen years old when I decided I wanted to change the world.

I didn't know how. I didn't have a plan. I had no money, no connections, and no particular qualifications beyond a stubborn certainty that the way things were wasn't the way things had to be. I grew up in Hungary, in a world that had very clear ideas about what a young woman could and couldn't become. The world I was walking into had its own ideas too.

So I did what most young people do when they're told they can't change the world.

I believed it.

Not all at once. Not dramatically. It happened slowly, the way these things usually do, in the accumulation of small moments where someone else's version of what was possible became more real than my own. A career taken because it was sensible. A path followed because it was expected. Years spent being very good at things that weren't entirely mine.

I didn't stop wanting to change the world. I just stopped believing I was the kind of person who got to.

The Vikings had a word for the stories they told about themselves: sagas. Not myths. Not legends. Stories. Real accounts of real people who sailed into the unknown and came back changed.

I've spent more than twenty years working inside construction and trade businesses around the world. Every trade you can name, and a few you probably can't, from one-van crews to big contractors. Businesses built by people who got

up before dawn and worked harder than most people will ever understand, building something from nothing with their hands and their guts and their refusal to quit.

In all that time, across all those businesses, all those countries, all those thousands of hours in site offices and kitchen tables and boardrooms that were really just someone's garage with a whiteboard, I kept hearing the same thing.

Not from every business owner. Not out loud. But in the quiet moments, when the session was almost over and the defences were down and the real conversation finally started.

"I just want to leave something behind."

"I want my son to be able to take this over one day, if he wants to."

"I want my kids to look back at what I built and know it meant something."

"I've worked so hard. I just want it to matter beyond me."

Legacy. That's what they were really asking about.

Not software. Not systems. Not scheduling or invoicing or job management. Those were the presenting problems: the things that filled the agenda and drove the sessions. But underneath all of it, in the space where the real conversations happened, what these business owners were really wrestling with was this:

Am I building something worth leaving behind?

I thought about that question for a long time. And then, somewhere between a late flight and an early morning and a conversation I almost didn't have, I thought about the Vikings.

Not the ones from the movies. Not the horned helmets and the raiding parties and the Hollywood version of Norse fury. The real ones.

The Vikings were extraordinary. They were master navigators who crossed oceans that no European had crossed before them, using nothing but sunstones and star paths and an intimate knowledge of birds and wind and current. They were engineers whose longship designs are still studied by naval architects today: a clinker-built hull so sophisticated it could flex in rough seas without breaking, shallow enough to beach on any shore, seaworthy enough to cross the North Atlantic. They were traders who built commercial networks stretching from Newfoundland to Constantinople, from the Arctic Circle to the Caspian Sea. They established the world's first parliament (the Althing in Iceland in 930AD) eight hundred years before modern democracy.

And they were obsessed with legacy. With being remembered not just by history but by their children, and their children's children. The Hávamál, the collection of Viking wisdom that survives from the Old Norse sagas, opens with one of the most powerful statements about legacy ever written:

*Cattle die, kinsmen die,
the self must also die;
but the glory of a good name
never dies.*

— Hávamál, Verse 76

They weren't building for themselves. They were building for what came after them.

That's when I saw it. The parallel that had been sitting right in front of me for twenty years, hiding in plain sight.

The trade business owners I worked with, the ones who stayed up at night worrying about their businesses, who built teams and managed cash flow and kept showing up through the hard seasons, were doing exactly what the Vikings did. They were building in difficult conditions, with limited resources, against forces they couldn't always control, toward something they hoped would last beyond them.

They just didn't have a framework for it. They didn't have a code.

That's what Trade Like a Viking is.

It's not a mythology. It's not a gimmick. It is, genuinely, the most accurate framework I know for what it takes to build a trade business that lasts. A business that doesn't fall apart when you step back. A business your team can run without you being in everything. A business your children can choose to step into, or choose to sell, because it has genuine value beyond the person who built it.

The Viking Code isn't something I invented. It's something I discovered in twenty years of watching what the best trade businesses do differently from the rest. I gave it a name. The Vikings were already living it a thousand years ago.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I need to tell you something about myself before we go any further.

I am not a tradie. I have never run a plumbing business or climbed a roof or wired a switchboard. But this book comes from more than twenty years of working in and with construction and trade businesses, in their offices, on their systems and alongside their owners and teams. I see the work from a different seat, and I've come to understand that this is exactly why I can see what those inside the business often can't.

I was born in Hungary. I've lived and worked across four continents. I have an accent that confuses people at conferences. They can't quite place it, and honestly, after this many years, neither can I. I live on a farm in rural Queensland with my husband and our dogs and a view that makes everything else feel smaller and more manageable.

And somewhere along the way, after many years and many countries and many versions of myself, I came back to the thing I wanted at eighteen.

To change the world.

I know how that sounds. And I know what you might be thinking: this is a business book about trade operations. What does changing the world have to do with it?

Everything, as it turns out.

Because the trade business owners I work with aren't just running businesses. They're building livelihoods for their families. They're employing people who are supporting their own families. They're keeping communities functioning: the electricians who keep the lights on, the plumbers who keep the water

running, the builders who put roofs over people's heads. They're creating something real, with their hands and their knowledge and their relentless commitment to showing up.

If I can help those businesses run better (think more clearly, build more deliberately, leave something genuinely worth leaving) then I am, in my own way, changing the world.

One trade business at a time.

*I stopped waiting for permission. I started building instead.
This book is what I built.*

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Trade Like a Viking™ is built around eleven principles: The Viking Code™. Each chapter explores one principle through a Viking story, a business lesson, a real trade business example, a practical tool, and a question for you to sit with.

You can read it straight through, or you can dip into the chapters that speak to where you are right now. If your team is struggling, start with Chapter III. If you're thinking about succession, go straight to Chapter X. If you're not sure why you're still doing this, Chapter XI is written for you.

At the end of the book you'll find the Viking Code Operational Audit, a 55-point self-assessment across all eleven principles. Complete it before you start reading, and again when you finish. The difference will tell you everything about where your business has moved.

The Viking Code is not a destination. It's a way of building.

Let's start building.

*Erika Entz
Queensland, Australia
2026*

PART ONE

THE FOUNDATION



PRINCIPLE I
PLAN THE VOYAGE

PRINCIPLE I

PLAN THE VOYAGE

A ship without a heading is just drifting.

THE STORY
BRISBANE, 2007

I wasn't supposed to be there.

The recruitment agency had called me about a job in the beauty industry, which was where my head was, where my plans were, where I expected my next two weeks to go. But they had a gap to fill. A small electrical, HVAC and UPS business in Brisbane needed a temp for a fortnight. Could I start Monday?

I said yes. I needed the work. I didn't give it much more thought than that.

The business had around seventeen people: four or five in the office, twelve or so out in the field. It was a real trade business in every sense: good people, hard workers, a solid reputation built over years of showing up and doing the job properly. The kind of business that keeps cities running, even if nobody outside the industry ever thinks about it that way.

And sitting on the front desk, in a business that had invested in a field service management platform called Simpro six months earlier, was an A4 paper calendar.

Handwritten. Jobs pencilled in. Phone messages clipped to the margins. The entire scheduling operation of a seventeen-person trade business, running on the same system it had always run on, because the software sitting open on every computer in the office was, for all practical purposes, invisible.

They had the ship. They just hadn't learned to sail it.

I'm not a technologist. I want to be clear about that. Before this, I had worked as an office manager for a commercial and residential HVAC and electrical business in New South Wales. I knew how a trade office ran, but that business had no operational software, only its accounting package. I had never used a field service management system, and I had no particular reason to think I could do what I was about to do.

What I had was curiosity. And time: two weeks of it, sitting at a front desk with a system nobody was using.

So I started asking questions. I read everything I could find. I clicked through every screen and every menu and every function that Simpro offered, not because anyone asked me to, but because it seemed extraordinary to me that something so capable was sitting completely dormant in a business that clearly needed exactly what it could do.

Within a week I was scheduling jobs in the system.

Within a month I was training the office team.

The two-week temp job became eighteen months.

But here's the part of this story that matters most, the part that turned out to be the most important professional moment of my life up to that point.

After about a month of working with Simpro, I started writing notes. Things the software could do better. Workflows that didn't quite make sense. Features that were almost there but needed refinement. I wasn't asked to do this. Nobody knew I was doing it. I was a temp. It wasn't my job.

But I sent the recommendations to Simpro anyway.

The response I got back wasn't what I expected.

They didn't dismiss the feedback from an unknown temp at a small Brisbane business. They engaged with it.

They told me I should come and work for them as an implementation consultant.

In 2009 I reached out to the CEO of Simpro directly and asked if they had a job for me.

They had approximately fourteen employees at the time. I became approximately the fifteenth.

I stayed for fourteen years.

When I was made redundant in 2023,
Simpro had more than 600 employees.

I'm telling you this story not to impress you. I'm telling you because it is the most precise illustration I know of the central argument of this book.

That Brisbane business had Simpro for six months before I walked through the door. Six months of paying for a platform that could have transformed how they scheduled, invoiced, communicated with clients and managed their field team. Six months of an A4 calendar sitting next to a computer screen.

The problem was never the software.

The problem was that nobody had stopped. Thought carefully about what they actually needed it to do. And then built a plan to get there.

They had invested in a destination they hadn't learned how to navigate to.

THE VIKING STORY

NAVIGATING THE UNKNOWN

In the summer of 1000AD (give or take a few years, depending on which saga you consult) a Norse explorer named Leif Eriksson sailed west from Greenland into waters no European had charted.

He was not sailing blind.

The Vikings were the most sophisticated navigators of the medieval world, a fact that tends to surprise people who know them primarily through the lens of Hollywood raids and horned helmets. (The helmets, for the record, almost certainly didn't have horns. That particular myth was largely invented by a nineteenth-century Swedish artist.) The reality of Viking navigation is far more remarkable than any myth.

Viking navigators used a remarkable array of tools and techniques to cross some of the world's most challenging open water. They read the behaviour of seabirds: certain species whose flight paths reliably indicated the direction of land. They tracked wave patterns and ocean swells that changed near coastlines. They observed the colour and temperature of water. They used the stars on clear nights and the position of the sun during the day.

And, most fascinatingly, they appear to have used a device called a sólarsteinn: a sunstone. Researchers believe this was a form of Iceland spar, a translucent calcite crystal that, when held up to an overcast sky, could reveal the position of the sun even when it was invisible behind cloud cover. The Vikings were navigating by polarised light centuries before the science to explain it existed.

Leif Eriksson didn't stumble onto North America. He planned his way there. He had knowledge passed down from earlier explorers, likely including Bjarni Herjólfsson, who had reportedly sighted land west of Greenland decades earlier but hadn't stopped to explore. Leif gathered that intelligence, assembled a crew of thirty-five men, provisioned the ship, and sailed with a destination in mind.

He called what he found Vinland (Wineland) for the wild grapes that grew there. The settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada, confirmed by archaeological excavation in the 1960s, is the oldest known European settlement in North America. It predates Columbus by approximately five hundred years.

The Vikings didn't sail by hoping for good weather. They built ships that could handle the storm, and navigators who knew where they were going before they left.

What made Viking exploration possible wasn't courage alone, though they had plenty of that. It was preparation. It was the accumulation of knowledge, the refinement of tools, the obsessive attention to conditions before a single oar was pulled. They knew their destination. They had a plan for getting there. And they had contingencies for when things went wrong, because things always went wrong at sea.

The Norse word for this kind of deliberate preparation was *forvitni*, a compound of *for* (before) and *vitni* (knowledge). It means, roughly, the wisdom that comes before action. The knowledge you gather before you sail.

It is, in every meaningful sense, the opposite of how most trade businesses approach major decisions.

THE BUSINESS LESSON

DRIFT VS DIRECTION

Most trade businesses don't have a direction problem. They have a drift problem.

There's a difference. A direction problem means you've chosen the wrong heading. You know where you're going; it's just the wrong place. A drift problem means you haven't chosen a heading at all. You're responding to whatever arrives. The urgent always defeats the important. The loudest customer gets the attention. The newest software gets the subscription. The biggest problem gets the meeting.

And then one day you look up and realise the business is running you, not the other way around.

I've seen this in businesses of every size, all around the world. And what's striking is how consistent the pattern is, regardless of trade type, team size or revenue. The business owner who is genuinely excellent at the work, who built their reputation on quality and reliability and doing the job properly, finds themselves, years later, trapped inside an operation that has grown around them like a cage.

More staff means more complexity. More complexity means more problems. More problems means more of the owner's time consumed by things that shouldn't require their time at all. The business grows. The freedom shrinks. And somewhere along the way the reason they started this in the first place (the independence, the pride, the idea of building something) gets buried under the daily weight of just keeping it moving.

The businesses that scale and the ones that plateau are separated by almost always the same thing: someone lifted their head and picked a direction.

Planning the voyage doesn't mean having all the answers. Leif Eriksson didn't know exactly what he would find west of Greenland. What he knew was the direction, the distance, the conditions to watch for, and what he would do when things didn't go according to plan, because they never entirely do.

For a trade business, planning the voyage means being able to answer three questions clearly:

- 1. Where is this business going?** Not in vague terms. Specifically. In three years, what does the business look like? How many staff? What revenue? What kinds of clients? What does a good week feel like?
- 2. What needs to be true for us to get there?** What systems need to exist? What team capabilities are missing? What tools need to be properly implemented? What needs to stop, so better things can start?
- 3. What are we doing this week that moves us toward that answer?**

Most trade businesses can answer the third question in their sleep. They are extraordinarily good at the week. The problem is the week keeps arriving without connecting to anything larger. The work gets done. The invoices go out, eventually. The jobs are scheduled, somehow. But none of it is building toward a specific destination because the destination was never named.

You cannot navigate to a place you haven't decided to go.

THE TOOL

THE VIKING BUSINESS COMPASS

The Vikings used multiple navigational references simultaneously, never relying on a single instrument or a single source of information. Their navigational intelligence was a composite of many inputs, constantly updated, constantly refined.

The Viking Business Compass works the same way. It is not a single plan. It is four directional questions that, answered honestly, give you a complete navigational picture of where your business is and where it needs to go.

THE VIKING BUSINESS COMPASS

NORTH: Your Destination. Where is this business going? In three years, what does it look like, specifically? Write it down. If you can't write it down in two paragraphs, you don't know where you're going yet.

SOUTH: Your Lessons. What has the last twelve months taught you? What worked, and more importantly, what didn't? What patterns keep repeating that you haven't addressed? The south tells you what you're carrying from the past that you need to account for.

EAST: Your Opportunities. What opportunities exist right now that you haven't pursued? New service lines, underserved markets, technology advantages, partnership possibilities. Don't evaluate them yet. Just name them.

WEST: What to Release. What is your business still doing that it should stop? Clients that cost more than they're worth. Processes that exist because they always have. Tools you're paying for and not using. The west is what you leave behind in order to sail lighter.

Work through the compass alone first. Then bring your key people into the conversation. The best navigational decisions the Vikings made were collective: the jarl set the heading, but the experienced crew shaped the route.

Use the compass quarterly. A heading that made sense in January may need adjustment by April. The ocean changes. The business changes. The compass keeps you honest.

THE QUESTION

If your business were a ship, where is it currently headed?

And is that where you actually want to go?

Sit with that question. Don't answer it quickly. The honest answer (not the polished version you'd give at a conference, but the real one) is the starting point for everything that follows in this book.

You cannot plan a voyage to a destination you haven't named.

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The Hávamál

The Hávamál (Words of the High One) is a collection of Old Norse poems from the Viking Age, preserved in the 13th-century Codex Regius manuscript. It is attributed to the god Odin in the Norse tradition but reflects practical Viking wisdom on conduct, hospitality, and legacy. Multiple English translations exist; the version referenced throughout this book draws primarily on the Bellows (1923) and Larrington (1996) translations.

END OF SAMPLE

THE VOYAGE CONTINUES

You have just read the Author's Note and Principle I of *Trade Like a Viking™*.

The full book takes you through all eleven principles of The Viking Code™, from building strong ships and trusting your crew to leaving a legacy, plus the Operational Audit, the Viking Code Toolkit and the 90-Day Viking Blueprint.

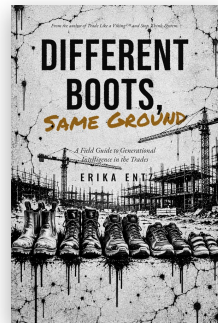
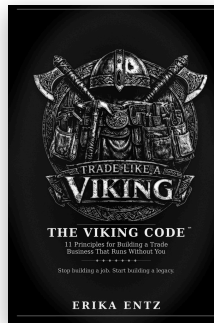
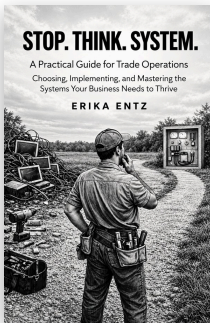
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