# GOOD ENOUGH

## Chapter 1

### The Most Expensive Ceiling

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*Welcome.*

This is the first chapter of *Good Enough*, and it's the one that makes the argument. Everything after it is the working out.

Read it with one team in mind. Ideally a team that's performing well. That's where good enough hides, and it's the easiest place to miss.

The book is out on 15 September 2026. If you're reading this because someone forwarded it to you, there's a link at the end.

Davide

## Chapter 1 — The Most Expensive Ceiling

> *Das Beste in der Musik steht nicht in den Noten.*
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> The best in music is not set down in the notes.
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> — Gustav Mahler, as recalled by Bruno Walter

Anything can happen on a Saturday.

You either go out after it, or you just accept what comes through the door.

It's the end of a long week. A new lineup lands Monday, and the team can feel the finish line.

The mood on the floor is good. The place smells the way it should, butter and sugar and the warm edge of the ovens, and the team's moving with the ease that comes from a week of repetition, the kind where the work runs on muscle memory and the mind drifts a little toward Sunday, the one day the doors are shut. Customers who walk in get the signature welcome. The regulars get a smile and the usual small talk: the couple who come in every Saturday after their walk, the dad whose kids already know their flavor before they reach the counter. Managers are encouraging. The product's good, the line's steady.

Stand in the doorway for an hour and you'd see a team that likes its work and a location that knows what it's doing.

Nothing is wrong. That matters more than it sounds like it should.

The numbers tell the same warm story. Labor's sitting right where it should for a Saturday this size. Food cost is where it should be this week. The crew was scheduled against the historical data, the same data that's called this day correctly for months. One dressing station, where cookies get their final finish, is running, which is the right call: the volume the model predicted doesn't need two, and those hands are better used keeping the line moving.

Partway through the afternoon, a flavor sells out, the one a few people came in specifically for. A crew member tells them gently, offers a kind word and a voucher for a free dessert on the next visit, and the small letdown passes without friction. They handle it well. That's the end of it.

This is a location operating exactly as designed. Every target the system set, the team met. Labor, food cost, crew count, the menu as listed: all of it delivered cleanly, on a busy day, by people who cared enough about the work. By the measures every operator watches, this is what winning looks like.

So, the question.

If everything that was asked for was delivered, what did the day actually cost?

It isn't in anything that went wrong. It's in everything that was never asked for.

One dressing station ran where the model called for one. The right call, and a responsible one.

At the counter, every order went out the way it should. A brief, genuine smile. The order shown to the customer, then slid across the counter, and the crew member already turning to the next.

Done exactly right, that turn wouldn't have come so fast. The crew member would have repeated the whole order back, and added the kind of line that turns a customer into a regular: "This one's my favorite. You'll have to let me know what you think when I see you next week." Then waited, eyes on the customer, until they reached the door.

No one walked a customer out to the car. No one offered a photo at the iconic pink wall. Nothing in the job asked for it, and no dashboard would ever have measured it. So none of it happened.

The crew was scheduled to the minute, the way every responsible manager schedules. Nothing wasteful in it. And nothing spare, either. Never quite enough bodies in the bakery to make a customer walk in and think, *something's happening here today*.

The dashboard was the ceiling. They reached it.

And reaching the ceiling felt, all day long, exactly like success.

That's good enough.

And the catch: nothing in it is wrong. Nothing in it is bad. The competence is real, the team is performing, and by any fair measure the day was a success.

Most of the best companies in the world are running exactly like this, today, and calling it a good day.

And this isn't only a story about a bakery. It's the headquarters team that hits every target and imagines nothing past it. It's the regional group, the department down the hall, the project delivered on time, on budget, and not one inch further. Wherever good people meet the standard and stop there, this is what it looks like. They're not wrong to call it a good day.

But on that same Saturday, somewhere else in the same system, a location made and sold 10,000 cookies.

A thousand more than the next closest managed; nothing about the day itself was different. The same week. The same standards. The same ceiling on the same dashboard.

What made the difference was already in place before the doors opened.

That location called in every spare hand it had.

Both dressing stations ran. When they backed up, the team added a third to keep orders moving. Andy had tried it on a busy day earlier. When the team saw the same bottleneck, they reached for it again here.

A surprise cookie went onto the menu before open, and the pick was no accident. Something in this complex lineup was likely to sell out, so a fallback made sense, but this one was also the simplest to make, and it used up ingredients they were already sitting on. Busy Saturday, it covers a sellout. Slow Saturday, it clears excess and protects food cost. Either way, it earns its place.

The bakery was full of crew, and the customers noticed on the way in: the exact moment the average location, for all its competence, never quite made.

The average location read the dashboard as a ceiling, and delivered to it.

This one read the same dashboard as a floor, and started building.

Same systems. Same standards. The same Saturday, open to close.

The difference was a person. The owner-operator, who believed all the way down that good enough would never be his team's ceiling. And that belief didn't stay put. It moved. Into the crew, into the bakery, into a Saturday that had no reason to stand out and somehow did.

A drive to be great. An excitement the model never asked for and could never have scheduled. A refusal to accept just what comes through the door.

And those 10,000 cookies? A company record. No one's come close since.

No program built it. No dashboard caught it.

It was just Andy, being Andy.

## The two locations

You might be wondering what made Andy special. He didn't have more to work with than anyone else.

He ran the same recipes, the same equipment, the same training, the same dashboard as every other location in the system. Whatever Crumbl gave anyone, it gave Andy. His team sold more than any location in the system, a thousand more than the next.

Two teams. The same work, the same systems, the same standards. Completely different results. It happens in every operation, every business, every organization, and somewhere in yours, it's happening right now. When it does, the difference isn't in the system. You can audit the system; it was identical everywhere. The difference is the one thing the system can't install and the dashboard can't see.

Call it the belief layer.

Andy was a first-time owner. No background in food, none in retail, none in business or leadership. Nothing a franchisor screens for would have flagged him as the one to beat.

What he had instead was simpler. He wanted to be great at it. He was endlessly coachable. And especially at the start, he refused to run his bakery from too great a distance.

That last one is easy to underrate. Most people buy a franchise believing they've bought freedom: a business that runs without them. Then they meet the real complexity every operation carries (at Crumbl, a menu that changes every week), and they pull back. Andy leaned in. He stayed on the floor long after he'd earned the right to leave it. Walk into his bakery on an ordinary day and you might have taken him for one of the crew: apron on, hands in the work, first in before the doors opened and still there after close, reconciling the day.

He ran it differently with his people, too. He knew them, their lives, their families. He wanted to build something they could grow inside of. Hard conversations didn't come easily to him, and he had them anyway. Early on, one of his crew wanted to dress cookies, typically the most coveted job in the bakery, the last hands on a dessert before it reaches a customer. They weren't ready. Not fast enough yet, not precise enough. The easy move is to let it slide, or to let someone fail in front of the whole team. Andy did neither. He pulled them aside, off the floor and away from everyone, told them the truth, and moved them to where they could win while they built the skill.

The person stayed.

Now put that belief on a record Saturday, and not an easy one. That week's lineup was brand-new and genuinely hard to make. One dessert alone called for 150 eggs in every batch. The ovens never sat empty, not once all day: something sliding in the moment something came out, batch after batch, back to back. Customers lined up out the door and kept coming. The dressing station called counts back to the ovens as a flavor ran low, so the next batch was already baking before the warmers were empty. Loud and hot and going full tilt for hours. And under all of it, a rhythm: the sound of a team that had decided, together, this was a day they would win.

Every operation has a ceiling of its own, a real one this time: the most it can physically produce in an hour. Most days never come near it. Andy's team climbed all the way to it and stayed pinned at the very top of what it could produce, full out, for six hours straight. Then it eased, but to about two-thirds of that peak, and stayed there for hours more. Most operations that hit their limit collapse straight back down. Andy's eased back a third and kept producing, deep into the day, right up to close.

And they did it while prepping the entire next week's menu at the same time, work that normally gets a Saturday of its own. Record volume and full prep, at once. Even at the limit, nothing stayed sold out for long.

Extraordinary.

The system was identical in every location across two countries. Only Andy's hit 10,000. What separated that Saturday from every other was belief, turned into throughput.

In my direct observation, nobody runs a location the way an owner-operator does, but the difference was never how hard Andy worked the record day. He was barely there for it. He came in for an hour, maybe two, and left the floor to the leaders he'd spent months building. The biggest day in the company's history, and the owner spent most of it somewhere else, because by then the bakery didn't need him in it. He hadn't been answering to a better manual. He'd been answering to his own conviction about what his bakery and his people could be, and long before that Saturday he'd moved it into the crew, shift after ordinary shift, until it was theirs to run without him. They felt it, so they reached for it. The customers felt it, so they kept coming back.

Same systems. Same standards. The entire difference lived in the layer underneath both.

You have an Andy somewhere, or the makings of one. In your operation, your organization, your team. Someone turning in more than the inputs on paper can explain. The real question is whether you can see what makes the difference, because neither the dashboard, the quarterly review, the self-assessment, nor the survey you recently sent can. And they never will.

## The belief layer

So what is it, this layer underneath the system?

It isn't motivation, and it isn't mood. Motivation comes and goes; the belief layer is steadier than that. It's the answer each person carries to a question nobody ever says out loud: what is actually possible here, and is it worth my reaching for?

A system can tell people what to do. It can write the recipe, set the labor percentage, schedule the crew, and check that all of it happened. What a system cannot do is make someone believe the work is worth doing well when no one is checking. You can require the recipe. You cannot require the care. One is compliance, and you can install it in an afternoon. The other is belief, and it can't be installed at all. It can be built, or borrowed, or starved.

That's the line most leadership tools never cross. They live entirely in the territory of compliance, because compliance is the part you can see and count: the numbers in range, the target hit, the project shipped on time, the program rolled out. All real, all answerable, all sitting on the surface. The belief layer sits underneath every one of them, and it's the layer that decides whether your operation runs at good enough or somewhere past it.

Hand the same system to a team that believes the ceiling is real and a team that believes the ceiling is a floor, and you get two different operations out of identical parts. That's the variable. Andy didn't out-system anyone. He out-believed them, and his crew caught it, because belief is the one thing in an operation that's genuinely contagious. It moves person to person, in the small moments, never through a memo, never through a module.

You can't buy it. You can't mandate it. But you can see it, if you know which moment to look at.

## Average and adversity

So how do you see a thing no instrument is built to catch?

You change when you look.

Your engagement survey goes out on an ordinary week, and the numbers come back describing an ordinary week: what your people do when the schedule sticks, the product's in, the line moves, and nobody's under real pressure. Which is exactly what you asked it. That's worth knowing. It's also the easy half of the picture. It tells you what average looks like. If average is enough, this isn't your book. But if you've started to feel average as a ceiling, average is the one thing that will never show you the way past it.

The trap... You don't just record that number; you act on it. You staff to it, you promote on it, you decide who to trust and where to put your attention. And a calm-week survey will make two people look identical when one of them will carry you through your worst day and the other will be halfway out the door by lunchtime. On paper, on a good week, they read the same.

What the survey can't tell you is what happens the moment the week stops cooperating.

The shipment doesn't arrive. One crew stares at the empty dock and waits for a callback that isn't coming. Another has already split what's left, phoned the three customers who'll feel it, and put out a substitute nobody thinks to complain about.

A client erupts an hour before the deadline, and the lead is unreachable on a plane. One office lets it sit until the lead lands. In another, the most junior person on the file picks up the phone, because somewhere along the way they came to believe the account was theirs too.

Someone two desks over notices that a number in tomorrow's board deck is wrong. In one company, they keep it to themselves: it isn't their deck, and there's no upside in being the one who made a fuss. In another, they flag it, walk it to the person presenting, and own the fix, because getting it right for the company matters more to them than staying safely in their lane.

The system goes down on the busiest day of the quarter. One team posts the outage and goes quiet. Another is already on the phones, walking customers through a workaround they built themselves, for exactly this, that no one ever told them to build.

Same event, two operations. That's the moment that shows you what you actually built, because that's the moment no one is watching, and no one can make your people care.

That's also the moment that tells you the truth. Calm conditions flatter everyone: the work is easy, the wins are shared, no one is really tested, and almost anyone can look committed for the length of a good week. Pressure strips that away. What's left, when the easy version of caring is gone and no one would know if your people stopped trying, is the only version that was ever real.

Look back at Andy's record Saturday and you'll see it was never a calm day. It was the hardest lineup anyone had ever seen, the operation and the physical space both pushed to the limit, a sellout waiting to happen at every turn. That was an adversity test, and his team passed it. Not everyone believed in equal measure; some carried more than others, and the strongest belief pulled the rest along. But it was there before the pressure, at least in part. And a day like that builds more of it than a team walks in with. A survey taken the Tuesday before would have told you nothing about what they'd do that Saturday.

There's a team in Saskatchewan, Canada, I'll come back to, who met a crisis with no one from headquarters in the building and treated protecting the standard as the only option there was. Or one of the Alberta franchisees who, with his customers at risk of slipping away, did something about it himself, unasked and unseen, and my team and I only heard of it long after. These are the responses that matter. The crisis was just the occasion. What they reveal is everything a person believes when no one is making them believe it.

The best operations build for exactly that moment. At the Ritz-Carlton, it's written into the standards every employee carries: *I own and immediately resolve guest problems.* That word, *own*, does real work. It means the person who hears the problem is the person who solves it, then and there, without finding a manager and without asking permission. Within twenty minutes, someone follows up to confirm the guest is genuinely satisfied, not merely placated. The result is on record in the company's own Baldrige Award documentation: surveys of guests show between 92 and 97 percent leave with a memorable visit.

Sit with what that policy actually asks.

A company hands its most junior person the authority to act, unsupervised, in the moment most likely to go wrong.

At first glance, that looks like trust: we believe you'll get this right. And it is trust, as far as it goes. But when I asked Joseph Michelli about it, the author who consulted with and chronicled the Ritz-Carlton in *The New Gold Standard*, he put a truer word to it. Not only trust. Respect. "Trust says, I believe you'll make a good decision," he told me. "Respect says, the decision was always yours to make." The company didn't hand its people good judgment in that moment. It acknowledged the judgment was already theirs, and took away the permission slip that had been standing in front of it.

In Michelli's own words: "The standard doesn't create good people. It uncovers them." And the sharpest version of the idea: "You can't manufacture caring. You can only stop preventing it."

Look at what they built. The freedom to act at the worst moment of a guest's stay, handed to whoever is standing closest when it happens. That is the one moment your engagement survey will never reach, and the one the Ritz built for first. Which turns that 92 percent into something other than a satisfaction score. It is proof of what those people already believed, visible the moment the company stopped standing in its way. The number was never really about the guests. It reflects a belief that was there before the crisis arrived, in the person nearest to it.

The company put a price on that respect, too. That is a story for later.

This is the skill worth building before any other. I've named it Gap Mastery: the ability to see the distance between what your instruments report and what's actually happening, and the discipline to look straight at it. Average shows you the obvious, and if we're being honest, likely the thing you already suspected before the survey went out. Adversity shows you what's real. Most leaders have spent years studying the first and calling it the whole picture.

## What good enough costs

None of this is free.

The gap between a team at average and a team at its best carries a price. It's the same gap you've watched all chapter, Andy's 10,000 against everyone else's good enough, and Gallup has spent decades measuring what it costs across the economy.

Their Q12 meta-analysis, now in its eleventh edition and updated in 2024, sets the business units in the top quartile of engagement against those in the bottom. The top quartile runs 23 percent more profitable. It runs 78 percent lower on absenteeism.

Now read those two where you work, the way they show up in your week. The profitability gap is margin walking out the door this quarter, lost across a hundred small unsupervised moments where good enough was the ceiling. The order that never got the upsell. The customer who wasn't quite delighted enough to come back. The problem someone saw coming and decided wasn't theirs to flag. None of it shows up as a loss, because none of it was ever a number. It's the revenue that was sitting right there and was never reached for. The absenteeism gap is the shifts you're already scrambling to cover, the people who never quite wanted to be there, the work landing on whoever did show up, and the slow erosion of the ones strong enough to carry it.

Those figures are the price of where you already stand. The gap is open right now, in your operation, and you've been funding it out of margin every quarter you've run.

And it compounds. It accrues in every unsupervised moment of every shift and every project, across every location and every office, every day the gap stays open. The 23 percent is thousands of small missed moments, each one too minor to notice on its own, adding up to a number big enough to reshape your year. This is the most expensive thing in your business precisely because no line item ever names it.

The cost has been on your books all along. This chapter just put a name to it.

## Why the number won't move

Here's the question you came in with, the one that's been nagging at the back of your mind, quarter after quarter: why won't the number move?

You've done the work. You bought the recognition platform. You ran the engagement survey, twice a year, and acted on what it told you. You put your managers through the effectiveness training. None of that was lazy, and none of it was wrong. Great companies all over the world do exactly the same things, and they aren't foolish for it. You've been trying to solve the right problem with the best tools anyone ever handed you.

And the number didn't move. After enough quarters of that, a doubt starts to set in: maybe it's me. Maybe I'm not the leader who can move it.

It isn't you.

Every one of those tools shares a single flaw, and it has nothing to do with your effort. They all measure the average and manage the average. The survey samples a calm week. The platform rewards what's already visible. The training sharpens the manager who's already in the room. Each one has a ceiling built into it, and that ceiling sits at exactly the height of good enough. You can pour budget into them for a decade and they will carry you, faithfully, right up to the line, and not one inch past it. They were never built to reach the layer where the number is actually decided.

Look at what each of those tools was designed to do, and the ceiling makes sense. A survey is built to standardize, to turn a thousand messy human realities into one comparable number. A recognition platform is built to make good behavior visible and repeatable. Manager training is often built to bring the weakest performer up to standard. Every one of them is, at heart, a technology for enforcing a floor. And a floor, in its place, is a fine thing. But the moment you mistake it for the height of the building, the floor becomes the ceiling.

That's the answer to the question. The number didn't move because you've been working on the floor your tools can see, while the belief that moves it sits several floors down, in the dark. Nothing you were handed was ever built to reach it.

Which is why the thing that finally moves the number is so small it's easy to miss: a decision about where you choose to look.

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**What is the next most powerful decision?**

Stop measuring engagement at average.

Start measuring it at adversity.

Bring to mind the last thing that went wrong on your watch — the number that came in short, the project that slipped, the shift that fell apart. Don't ask who caused it. Ask who moved *toward* it. Average tells you who clears the bar. Adversity tells you who's reaching past it. That's the measure you've been missing, and it was never on the report.

## *Good Enough* is out on September 15, 2026.

If someone sent you this chapter, you can get the rest here:

**GoodEnough.DavideDiGiorgio.com**

That link will take you to wherever the book lives, whenever you happen to find this.

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### What's in it



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### Thanks for reading.

I speak on operational leadership — why a standard holds in some teams and collapses in others — and I work with leadership teams on the operating changes underneath, through masterclasses and a small number of advisory engagements each year.

If something in your operation is working and you can't work out why it isn't better, I'd love to hear about it.

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