

# PIVOT

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# MASTERING STRATEGIC BUSINESS GROWTH



## BRYAN McDONALD

### Chris O'Byrne

What led to you starting your company, onPurpose Growth?

### Bryan McDonald

It wasn't planned. I've dedicated my entire twenty-three-plus-year career to sales. My business partners, Jeff and Gavin, used to gather in a room together. Jeff successfully sold a B2B

networking group focused on twelve to fifteen non-competing individuals. We convened for half a day each month, discussing referrals and supporting each other's businesses. One day, Jeff approached me, suggesting I leave my job to join him and Gavin in starting a company specializing in X, Y, and Z for entrepreneurs. He noticed my abilities in strategy and

consulting during our meetings and envisioned me as the coach for the venture. I was taken aback, thinking, *What?!*

I believe everything happens for a reason. Several events unfolded in my life. First, the company I worked for was experiencing a series of peculiar occurrences, making me question the sustainability of staying there for the long haul.

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It became apparent the business owner would eventually sell the company. Simultaneously, another significant development occurred when a contact in my network, Eric, reached out to me. He expressed his discontent with the banking world and his desire to transition into financial services. Being passionate about markets, he asked me to impart my knowledge to him. I was again taken aback. He clarified that he wanted me to coach him. Subsequently, we began meeting every Monday in the office building where he worked. We shared lunch, and he paid me \$50 for each session. Within six months, he emerged as a top performer in every metric his company measured, on track to earn half a million dollars. That wasn't the cause of what I did with him; it was correlation, not causation. I helped him, but he had to do all the work.

Around that time, my business partner, Jeff, kept urging me, "Come on, come on, come on!" Finally, I thought, *Screw it, I'm making the jump*. However, it was around the time my wife and I had our first child. Imagine going home to your pregnant wife and saying, "Hey, I have this fabulous idea. I plan to resign from my current job even though it provides our income. I want to start a business, and while I can't predict how much money I'll make, I'm determined to do it right." Initiating such a conversation isn't easy for any

rational married man; in fact, it's quite the opposite. Regardless, I discussed this idea with my wife, and her response was, "Screw it, go for it." And here we are, nearly ten years later.

We adhere to the principle of staying in our respective lanes. I specialize in assisting clients with strategy and related aspects. I have a comprehensive understanding of Jeff's strategic elements, and my role involves helping people implement these strategies. We collaborate closely, pulling each other in when our expertise is most relevant to the situation. For consulting businesses, during consulting engagements, I work alongside Jeff and CEOs, playing a supportive role in the background while Jeff takes the lead. I assume the lead when implementing the strategy into sales teams, and Jeff takes a secondary role. We are both actively involved throughout the entire process; it's just that the leadership role shifts based on the specific task and goal.

#### **Chris O'Byrne**

On your website, it says: "Movement that matters." What is the movement you focus on?

#### **Bryan McDonald**

Sales and profitable growth are the key focuses. Moving the needle in these areas involves developing strategies and

processes that enhance efficiency and effectiveness.

In Chicago, we collaborated with a company specializing in selling temporary heating and cooling equipment. Most (90 percent) of their business targeted the construction sector, while the remaining 10 percent served retail and single-unit commercial real estate businesses. The company faced the challenge of being stuck at a \$10 million revenue mark.

We interviewed their top seven clients during our engagement to understand the perceived value. The company touted reliability, punctuality, and cost-consciousness as their strengths. However, clients revealed that their loyalty was deeply rooted in the company's history, with a second-generation owner maintaining a personal touch.

We recognized the challenge of duplicating such personal relationships and delved into their operational processes. The clients highlighted an internal procedure: Every piece of equipment underwent testing before being loaded onto the truck and again before being unloaded at the job site. This meticulous testing ensured defective machines were identified (1 percent of the time) and swiftly replaced.

This process set them apart, especially in the 10 percent of

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their business serving retail and single-unit commercial real estate. Clients in this segment valued reliability, akin to entering a warm Panera on a freezing day. In contrast, competitors often delivered defective manufacturing equipment due to inadequate care during transportation.

Understanding the unique value proposition allowed the company to differentiate itself and target specific segments where reliability and efficiency were paramount.

These clients prioritize swift and reliable service because any delay or malfunction means they lose money. Recognizing the unreliability of competitors (with a 50 percent failure rate), we developed a strategy and process to address this pain point. Our offer included a retainer contract: We compensated for the lost day's revenue if a machine failed to work upon arrival. In nine months, revenue increased by \$1.7 million and profit by \$1.8 million. This approach proved more lucrative than competing in the challenging construction sector, enabling the company to grow in Chicago and successfully expand to Dallas using the same strategy.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

You dug in, looked at their whole system, and pulled out what they couldn't quantify or express

until you worked with them. I'm assuming that 10 percent has since grown to more than 10 percent.

### **Bryan McDonald**

We weren't even involved in their decision to go to Dallas. Our objective is to enable clients to operate independently of our assistance. Therefore, our task is to work ourselves out of the equation. Once we integrated this approach with the sales team, we provided them with the sales process and outlined what they should be attentive to. If certain key elements aren't evident, they were advised to move on, as they might face a prospect that doesn't align with their criteria. Once the team embraced this strategy, they skyrocketed. The focus was on the path of least resistance, ensuring a smooth sales process devoid of unnecessary friction.

In contrast to the construction space, where concerns about switching, reliability, and pricing often arise, these clients had a different perspective. Their primary concern was ensuring openness and making the decision-making process straightforward. They were quick to sign on once that assurance was provided.

It's rooted in a concept known as the theory of constraints, like Lean Six Sigma and continuous improvement. Their

challenge lies in recognizing an operational effectiveness that could be harnessed in the marketplace. Our approach didn't involve altering their core activities; instead, we homed in on optimizing their existing processes.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

Could you give an overview of what the theory of constraints is?

### **Bryan McDonald**

The theory of constraints primarily centers around throughput—examining a business as a system and optimizing efficiency. This involves identifying bottlenecks and root causes, then either removing the bottleneck or mitigating its impact. For example, their sales bottleneck was related to targeting the wrong market. The bottleneck was eliminated by shifting focus to the right ideal client profile, as these clients didn't present the same objections. Operationally, their equipment throughput, from relocation to functionality, was already efficient. We capitalized on this efficiency and translated it into the marketplace. In sales, the goal is to smoothly bring people in, guide them through the process, and effectively integrate them into the system. Some transactions are singular, but for these clients, transactions occur repeatedly;

it's a contractual relationship, not a one-time occurrence.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

In my previous role as a chemical engineer in the paper industry, I experienced firsthand the rigor and complexity of process control and management. I want to emphasize that applying the theory of constraints is neither simple, easy, nor ineffectual. It can significantly impact your business, revenue, and reputation. The intricacies involved are numerous. So, when asked about the purpose of growing a company, what would your response be?

### **Bryan McDonald**

It has increased sales through strategic processes because we believe constructing an improved system can enhance overall effectiveness for your team or yourself as an entrepreneur. While sales skills are undeniably important, they come secondarily. Skilling up a sales team or yourself as a business owner, managing a consulting business, and acquiring the necessary skills are essential. However, they alone are not sufficient to reach your desired goals. Even with highly developed sales skills, the skills become irrelevant if the underlying strategy is flawed.

Here's another example illustrating the application of



strategy and pattern recognition. During the initial two to three months of our collaboration, I worked with a client who served as a fractional COO and EOS integrator. In his pipeline, he encountered visionary CEOs with incomplete leadership teams seeking a fractional COO or integrator. Despite engaging with around twelve such CEOs, he closed only one deal. The sales process with these clients tended to be prolonged, marked by non-committal behavior.

Conversely, he shared stories of visionary CEOs with complete leadership teams actively searching for a full-time integrator or COO. In these cases, he engaged in conversations with them as a thought partner, offering expertise on the matter. After about four discussions, these CEOs would reassess their needs

and realize they didn't require a full-time person.

He said, "I require someone to handle specific tasks and believe you're the right person for the job. Could you please provide me with a proposal?"

I advised him on our strategy, which involves refraining from engaging with individuals seeking a fractional COO. Instead, focus on initiating conversations with those who need a full-time person. This approach minimizes friction in the sales process and increases the likelihood of successful transactions.

Your strategic focus should be on the latter group instead of the fractional COO seekers. Regardless of your sales proficiency, the fractional buyer profile tends to move at a slower pace, making it more

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advantageous to concentrate on full-time positions.

### **Chris O’Byrne**

That’s a brilliant insight. I appreciate your recognition of the robust capabilities in handling the sales team and the sales process. Your holistic approach is commendable, acknowledging that success hinges on a well-established operational side, strategy, and processes. This overview provides a clear understanding.

What does that collaborative process typically entail when you engage with a sales team to enhance their performance or refine their processes?

### **Bryan McDonald**

Usually, they seek not just a transactional environment but more of a relational one. Therefore, I focus heavily on honing my listening and question-asking skills and learning how to collaboratively develop offers with clients. The approach involves encouraging them to articulate their desires. Then, I repackage the information and confirm, asking, “Is this truly what you want to achieve?” These sales skills, in my opinion, are crucial. Effectively breaking down the walls or barriers clients naturally put up to protect themselves is a key aspect of interacting in the sales world. It’s common for individuals to divulge minimal

information and retain some details, yet expect you to be accountable for inaccurate information they never disclosed.

In my conversation with a client last night, we delved into the importance of transparency in making progress with prospects. He emphasized that meaningful advancements can be achieved when prospects are open and vulnerable. Curious about his approach, I asked, “How do you foster transparency?” His response was simple but effective: “I’m transparent and vulnerable.” I acknowledged the power of this approach in facilitating communication and interaction instead of relying solely on closing techniques and tricks. In a world where everyone wants to buy but no one wants to feel sold to, the key lies in helping people make informed purchasing decisions. This involves assisting them in qualifying prospects by recognizing that not everyone is a genuine prospect; appearances can be deceiving, and some may never actually make a purchase.

The focus is on investing more time with the right people and less time with those who aren’t a good fit—qualifying people and guiding them through a sales process they genuinely find valuable. It goes beyond a mere transaction; it’s a mutual engagement involving both parties and one other person. Interestingly, this approach

involves teaching essential skills, particularly in listening—often referred to as consultative selling. In today’s sales landscape, there’s a growing shift toward consultative selling because people prefer buying rather than being aggressively sold to; they want a partnership, not a quick sales pitch.

This process is akin to nurturing a gradually accelerating train. Once it gains momentum, it becomes challenging to halt. As an entrepreneur or a sales organization, the goal is to find that unstoppable train, not a roller coaster. Approaching sales in this manner often leads to success, creating a path of least resistance within the sales organization.

### **Chris O’Byrne**

Can you think of an example of that kind of transparency? Because I would imagine there are some instances where a salesperson is used to doing things a certain way, and they must be taught to be more transparent.

### **Bryan McDonald**

I’ll start with this. When you grasp and implement this concept, you realize its immense power. It’s highly influential. A prime illustration of transparency, presented clearly, is entering a conversation with others and portraying with your

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tone and body language that you're saying, "Hey, Chris, I'm here to listen and understand what's going on because, at this moment, I'm not certain if I can assist you." Now, granted, some people employ this tactic as a strategy.

It's about authenticity and honesty throughout the process. For instance, acknowledging limitations by saying, "If this is your issue, we're not particularly skilled in that area. I understand you want a solution, but it's not our strong suit right now." This kind of transparency establishes that you're on their side.

Another aspect of transparent vulnerability is addressing challenges causing discomfort. Consider a scenario where someone is grappling with a problem leading to excessive work hours, impacting their family. Initiating a conversation by saying, "How are you managing this? I've faced a similar situation where excessive work affected my family, and I recently discussed it with my daughter. Here's what transpired..." allows people to connect on a human level. Now, they see you as a fellow human, granting them permission to share their struggles.

Moreover, this openness extends to business-related challenges, as in, "This issue is affecting my business, but more importantly, it's impacting my personal

life. I need your assistance in resolving this because..." This approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal and professional aspects, fostering understanding and collaboration.

It's important to get to the core issue. The core issue is that I don't have the hypotheticals in this situation. The core issue isn't that I have this business problem; that's a symptom of the actual problem. The problem is I can't go hang out with my family. If you help me resolve this, it will give me more time to do that. This is how it affects me personally. If you can build relationships like that, nobody can take that away from you.

When I was in the insurance space, I met the CEO of a law firm. He wasn't an attorney; he was just the CEO of a law firm. I built a relationship with him.

When he left that business and moved elsewhere, he called me and said, "Hey, I need you to come over here." Right after that, I started my coaching business. He relocated to Knoxville to become the company president, and a year into that, he called me and said, "Our guys need help. I need you to come down here. You can help these people." He's calling me and bringing business to me because he knows he can trust me. I won't just sell him something; I'll take care of what he needs.

If I call him, he returns my phone call. I can text him on a Saturday if needed to solve a problem. I have full access to the guy, as does he to me. We're sitting on the same side of the table. He'll tell me things about the CEO of the company. Like, "Hey, when you go into this, here's what you need to listen for, and here's what you need to watch for because



we need you to come in here. So, I need you to handle this conversation.”

### Chris O’Byrne

You talked about genuineness and authenticity. People can feel when you’re just using a line and only interested in making a sale versus wanting to understand and consult before you even talk about what you might be able to help them with.

### Bryan McDonald

Again, it’s like a slower-moving train. When you start operating like this, sales naturally follow. The more consistently you practice it, the more profound its impact on the market. Word spreads, and people start reaching out because they’ve heard, “Hey, you can talk to Bryan. If you have a problem, he’s the person to consult.” Bryan won’t push a sale unless he genuinely believes he can assist you. It’s a ripple effect of referrals and business because everyone perceives you not just as a salesperson but as a thought partner and a consultant; they trust your expertise.

### Chris O’Byrne

When you’ve been hired to help a company, I imagine you’re very data-driven and look deeply. What are those pieces of information people provide you with?



### Bryan McDonald

We’re assessing your conversion rate—what is it, and why do you believe it stands at its current level? Additionally, we’re delving into the details of how you execute your strategy. What specific tactics are you employing? Shifting the focus to client retention, we’ve encountered a scenario with a technology company where over 50 percent of clients disengage between months four, five, and six. Our examination involves scrutinizing the sales process: Where do clients enter and exit? How is the rollout managed, and where do they transition? Are they departing independently or opting for another service provider? Understanding the market dynamics is crucial: What portion do you currently capture, and what is the total market size? These are key aspects we’re addressing. Furthermore, we’re

actively exploring data-related issues: What challenges do you perceive, and what, in your opinion, is the root cause?

We’re strategically mapping out scenarios. Here’s an example: In a meeting with a client’s customer service and sales team, they highlighted a client communication issue resulting in late shipments. I asked, “How many shipments? What’s the monthly frequency?” My inquiry delved deeper: How many late shipments, and what’s the monthly frequency? Further probing revealed that the operations team stopped meeting six months ago, leading to a communication breakdown. Also, the shipping person operated in isolation. When we unpacked the details about the shipping process, it emerged that customers sent trucks for pickups 70 percent of the time, leading to delays and changes.



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The realization? It's not just a customer service problem; it's a shipping issue.

You need to connect the dots without blaming your customer service team. They are working with the data available to them and aren't the root cause of the problem; they're reacting to external factors. I suggest engaging with your customers, encouraging more efficiency in sending trucks and adhering to schedules. They might attribute the problem to your customer service, unaware their actions contribute to the issue.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

Communication creates such a significant effect on everything else. Were there communication issues beyond that? Was it systemic?

### **Bryan McDonald**

This example indicates a broader issue within the company—communication breakdown. Examining the meeting process and cadence is crucial. Clearly defining discussion topics, setting meeting frequencies, and establishing proactive problem-solving approaches can transform the dynamic. It's about actively managing problems rather than consistently reacting to them.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

Let's dig a little bit into your coaching and style. How does your style of coaching differ from the typical run-of-the-mill business coach?

### **Bryan McDonald**

Clients often express the key lies in discovering how to embody their true selves authentically. This realization, in turn, enhances their sales performance. They understand that beyond the service or product, the initial buy-in is personal; they buy into the individual. That's why honing soft skills such as listening and effective questioning is invaluable. Many aspire to embody these skills but may struggle to manifest them in their interactions. The intention is there. That's one aspect.

The second point is my belief that salespeople are essentially entrepreneurs. The majority create something from nothing. I work with them, as well as with fractional consultants and entrepreneurs who own their own businesses. Business growth is 50 percent about who you're becoming and 50 percent about skills and strategy. The person you're talking to right now isn't the same person who started onPurpose Growth ten years ago. It's a journey of personal and professional evolution.

As you grow, your business grows. Today's version of yourself yields specific results. To achieve better or different outcomes, you must evolve. Recently, an outsourced packaging engineer from Minnesota who is considering collaboration shared her realization. A year ago, she hadn't anticipated the personal growth aspect of her business journey. I focus on helping people transform into their desired selves, shifting from sales. Everything I believe, philosophize, and teach regarding client interactions with family, friends, and others goes beyond stereotypical sales scenarios.

As I mentioned earlier, in terms of specific sales aspects, our initial focus is strategy and defining the ideal client profile. Success's core lies in crystal-clear identification of your ideal client. It's about learning to think and communicate like them, guiding your strategy, interactions, and outreach. I prioritize a systematic approach over quick wins, emphasizing long-term growth rather than short-term success.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

What are some of the challenges you face when you are working with a client?

### **Bryan McDonald**

While I'm eager to assist in achieving quick results, there's a collective impatience for

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immediate victories. Don't get me wrong—I share the desire to win. However, I've expressed that my focus is more on long-term success than short-term gains. Therefore, I aim to guide people in slowing down to speed up, emphasizing the importance of creating a path of least resistance. It might be challenging because the issue they present is often, "I want to generate more leads. Help me with that." My response is that if we persist with current strategies, we'll only amplify what isn't working.

It's like a story I shared about the fractional person. I had the opportunity to assist him in generating more conversations around fractional assistance for those seeking fractions. Instead of looking for help from one out of twelve, we could have doubled that to two out of twenty-four.

On the contrary, the alternative approach concentrates on another aspect: Engaging with fewer people but enhancing conversion rates. This is a common challenge many people face.

It all stems from an iteration of defining their ideal client profile and aligning their daily activities with it. Your habits are intricately connected to this process. Assisting them in cultivating the right and effective habits is crucial because, while aiming for different results, our current

habits determine our present outcomes.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

It goes back to personal growth. The primary definition of your work is to transform them as a person.

### **Bryan McDonald**

Totally. We help them become who they want to become because the growth in sales is about the person who's on that end of it.

### **Chris O'Byrne**

How do you help them do that?

### **Bryan McDonald**

One way I discussed with a client last night involves starting with transparency and vulnerability. It's about saying, "This is going to be tough. It's going to be complicated. I'm not here with a magic solution." I pose the question: "Are you genuinely prepared for this journey? Because I'm going to challenge you. I'll highlight the positives and draw attention to the obstacles. Can you recognize those?"

Sometimes, it will be tough, but helping them understand that is vital. I recognize this truth about myself. The only positive outcomes emerge from navigating through challenging situations.

Therefore, it's about bringing them into the awareness that this journey will be challenging and demanding. This way, we can partner together. They need to realize I'm on their side—not here to criticize but to highlight aspects that enhance their awareness. Once awareness is raised, change becomes possible. Without awareness, one remains stuck in the same patterns. I'd say that's likely the most significant factor.

One approach I use to identify an ideal client is posing challenging questions during the sales process. If they respond actively, acknowledging the complexity and providing thoughtful answers like, "That's a great question, and here's why I do this and this..." I understand this person is inclined to tackle the tough aspects of their work.

They're coachable in specific areas. For instance, I get specific when I ask them about concerns outside of sales, like reaching out to somebody. I inquire about the story they tell themselves in that situation. Uncovering the underlying narrative allows us to delve into something personal, not necessarily related to sales. People often live within narratives that overlay their activities and drive them.

People live within narratives. Therefore, I'm trying to help them notice the narrative they are living. I ask, "What's the

story you're telling yourself?" and then explore the possibility of rewriting the story. Can something else be true? What else is possible? Often, this process leads to personal growth that benefits their business and enhances their overall life.

### Chris O'Byrne

Do you ever assign books for them to read? If so, what are some of those titles?

### Bryan McDonald

Absolutely. It all depends on what's showing up. Some books resonate with those just dipping their toe into the subject, while others can go straight to the heart of things.

*The Obstacle is the Way* by Ryan Holiday is one such book. It emphasizes the constant need for persistence because challenges

will inevitably arise. The key to success lies in viewing these challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. I often convey that entrepreneurship is neither a straight line nor an easy path.

Another notable book is *You Are a Badass* by Jen Sincero. In this book, she shares her journey of establishing a coaching business. She outlines her transformation from starting at zero to reaching a million once she commits to making a change.

In the realm of sales, *Getting Naked* by Patrick Lencioni stands out as a fantastic business fable that focuses on the importance of being authentic and human. I recommend this one for those who may not want to go as deep.

Ultimately, the choice of books depends on the individual and their preference for depth.

These are just a couple of recommendations, and I usually go with what feels right at the moment.

### Chris O'Byrne

I imagine you've learned many valuable lessons and have seen things people should apply to their businesses and lives. What are some words of wisdom you'd like to leave people with?

### Bryan McDonald

Success in this journey won't be a cakewalk; it's about personal growth as much as sales or business revenue. Your mindset is crucial, surpassing techniques every time. It's not just about the "what" and "how" but who you are while doing it. You don't need to memorize words; I'll provide them initially, but the key is internalizing and expressing them in your authentic voice.

It happens every time. Understanding the core philosophy is vital, avoiding more repetition to maintain authenticity. In sales, focus on genuine communication and connection, steering clear of manipulative tactics. While these tactics might work with a buyer in a must-buy situation, most people won't respond well.

Lastly, prioritize strategy and process over conventional skills for swift progress. When I mention skills, I'm referring



to typical sales skills, excluding communication. Many clients have succeeded significantly by concentrating on a personalized strategy and developing a repeatable process. This approach allows them to win effortlessly, achieving more success with less effort. The goal is not just about making money but reclaiming time and freedom in growing a business or excelling in sales.

### Chris O'Byrne

In addition to your website, [onpurposegrowth.com](http://onpurposegrowth.com), what is the best place for people to learn more about you?

### Bryan McDonald

I hang out on LinkedIn a lot. All my socials end in McDonaldBryan. I also have a personal website, [mcdonaldbryan.com](http://mcdonaldbryan.com).

## Action Steps

**1. Focus on Your Unique Value Proposition:** McDonald's story about the company specializing in temporary heating and cooling equipment highlights the importance of understanding what sets your business apart. Take time to analyze what makes your service or product unique and valuable to your customers. This could involve conducting client interviews or surveys to get

direct feedback on why they choose your business. Once you identify your unique value proposition, make it the cornerstone of your marketing and sales strategy.

- 2. Adopt a Strategy-Centric Approach:** McDonald emphasizes the significance of strategy in achieving sales and business growth. Rather than just focusing on improving sales skills or marketing techniques, take a step back to evaluate and refine your business strategy. This might involve defining your ideal client profile more clearly, examining your market positioning, or reassessing your business goals. A well-thought-out strategy can guide you in making more effective business decisions and in targeting your efforts more precisely.
- 3. Embrace Transparency and Authenticity in Sales:** McDonald's approach to sales, which emphasizes transparency, authenticity, and building trust, can be a game changer. Train yourself and your sales team to approach clients with honesty and a genuine desire to understand and solve their problems, rather than just pushing for a sale. This can lead to stronger, long-lasting client relationships, repeat business, and referrals. Practicing transparent

communication and being authentic in your interactions can set you apart in a competitive market.

### About the Author

Bryan McDonald is a partner with onPurpose Growth, a coaching and consulting firm that serves entrepreneurs who have ambitious yearly or multi-year revenue goals actually fulfill their ambition. He also is the Board President of the Fox Valley Entrepreneurship Center (FVEC.ORG) that is an economic development non-profit that helps entrepreneurs accelerate their growth to stimulate job creation and revenue growth in the western suburbs of Chicago. Learn more at [mcdonaldbryan.com](http://mcdonaldbryan.com).