FREE RESOURCE

Recurring Emergency Playbook

Turn predictable disruptions into a plan your team can follow.

Bradley Hankins Consulting

AI WORKFLOW CONSULTING FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

How to Use This Playbook

Pick one recurring problem at a time. Don't try to build twenty playbooks in one sitting — start with whichever disruption happens most often or costs you the most when it does. Fill in each section below, then keep the finished playbook somewhere the whole team can find it in under thirty seconds — not buried in an email thread or a folder nobody remembers the name of.

The Playbook Template

1. Recurring Problem Name it plainly. What is the specific, repeating disruption this playbook covers? ("Our scheduling system goes down during peak call volume" is specific. "Tech issues" is not.)

2. Trigger What's the observable signal that this playbook should be activated? Be concrete — a specific error, a missed deadline threshold, a customer complaint pattern, a system alert.

3. Decision Owner Who has the authority to declare this playbook active and make the calls that follow? Name the person, not just the role — and name a backup in case that person is unreachable.

4. Immediate Steps The first three to five actions to take in the first several minutes, in order. This is not the full fix — it's what stops the bleeding and gets the right people looped in.

5. Communication Plan Who needs to know, and how do they hear it? Cover both internal (team, leadership) and external (customers, vendors, partners) audiences. Specify the channel — a group text, a shared status doc, an email template — not just "let people know."

6. Backup Owner If the primary decision owner from Step 3 is unavailable, who steps in? A playbook that only works when one specific person is reachable isn't a real playbook.

7. Recovery Process Once the immediate steps are handled, what's the process to fully resolve the issue and return to normal operations? Include who confirms it's actually resolved, not just quieted down.

8. After-Action Review After the incident is resolved, what questions get asked? At minimum: What triggered it this time? Did the playbook work as written? What would have made the response faster? Should the trigger definition, the steps, or the owner change before next time?

9. Next Review Date Set a specific date to revisit this playbook, even if it hasn't been used again. Playbooks that are never reviewed quietly go stale — the backup owner changes roles, the communication channel gets replaced, and nobody notices until the playbook fails when it's needed.

Worked Example (Filled In)

To show the format in practice — not as a template for you to copy, but as an illustration:

- **Recurring Problem:** Online booking system goes down during Friday afternoon peak hours.
- **Trigger:** Two or more customers report being unable to book within a 15-minute window, or the internal error dashboard shows the booking API returning failures.
- **Decision Owner:** Office Manager (backup: Assistant Manager).
- **Immediate Steps:** (1) Confirm the outage via the error dashboard. (2) Post the manual-booking phone number to the website banner and social channels. (3) Notify front-desk staff to begin taking bookings by phone. (4) Open a support ticket with the booking software vendor. (5) Log the start time of the outage.
- **Communication Plan:** Internal — group text to front-desk and management. External — banner on the website, a pinned post on the business's Facebook/Instagram with the phone number.
- **Backup Owner:** Assistant Manager, if Office Manager is unreachable within 10 minutes.
- **Recovery Process:** Vendor confirms system restored → Office Manager tests a real booking end-to-end → banner and social posts removed → front desk notified it's safe to direct customers back online.
- **After-Action Review:** Was this the same root cause as the last outage? Did the 15-minute detection window work, or did customers wait longer than that before anyone noticed? Should there be an automated alert instead of relying on customer reports?
- **Next Review Date:** Quarterly, or immediately after any use.

> *This playbook is provided by Bradley Hankins Consulting. If the same disruption keeps costing your team time and nobody's written down what to do about it,* ***request a free 30-minute workflow assessment.***