

# UNSTUCK!

For Painters Stranded at  
**\$150K to \$350K**  
in Personal Income

The Mindset, Systems & Strategies  
that Unlock Cash-Flow

By **Brandon Lewis**, Founder —  
The Academy for Professional  
Painting Contractors



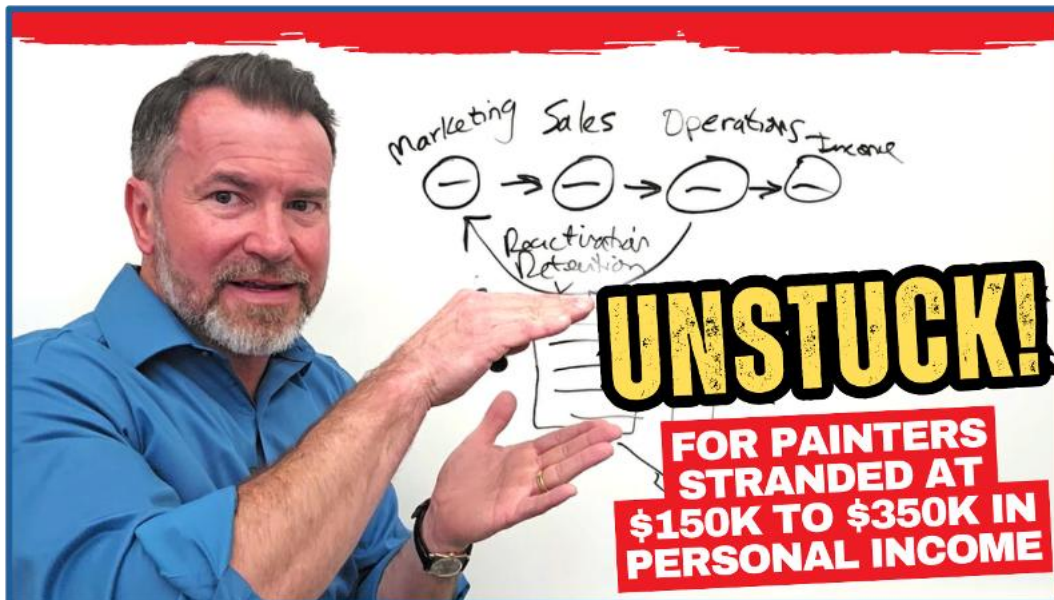
THE ACADEMY FOR  
**PROFESSIONAL  
PAINTING  
CONTRACTORS**



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*Academy for Professional Painting Contractors*

12 Years · 801+ Painters Coached · 7 Countries

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## SECTION ONE

# Opening Message

You've been running your painting business for years. Even though it has grown in revenue, even though you've hired painters, put people in the office, and placed people in the field, for whatever reason your personal income seems stuck and stalled.

Maybe your business feels out of control. Maybe your days are hectic and long. And despite your best efforts — and perhaps despite going out and trying to find educational videos or coaching tools — you're still not where you want to be.

*If you go through this masterclass all the way to the end, you will discover the key systems you need to implement and the metrics that are upstream from income and how they control your personal cash flow.*

In this training, I'm going to convey the wisdom and knowledge I have gained coaching 801 painting contractors in seven different countries over 12 years, along with what I've gleaned from the industry's most experienced coaching staff here at the Academy for Professional Painting Contractors, with 87 years of combined experience.

I'm not going to spoon-feed you sound bites today. I'm not going to try to put on some shiny, polished coaching presentation just so you'll enroll in our programs. Instead, I'm going to give you an education.

Get a pen and paper, go somewhere quiet — somewhere removed from distractions. I would not try to consume this in bite-sized chunks.



## SECTION TWO

## Brandon Lewis: Background & Perspective

I grew up in Arab, Alabama, dirt poor. My dad could not read or write. We were in utter poverty — one sink in the kitchen, old red well water, no air conditioning. Just Appalachian dirt poor. But I went to college, got an undergraduate degree in marketing, and earned an MBA, because my father told me, "Son, you've got to get an education."

Fast forward: I spent the first part of my career in the crucible of marketing, sales, and operations by running campaigns. I've run 14 political campaigns at the federal, state, and local levels. All of them were successful. In politics, you've got maybe 18 months, and it's winner-take-all.

Even though Brandon Lewis has never personally painted anything in his entire life, I grew a painting business to over a million dollars — which would be roughly a \$2 million painting business today. I sold it for \$440,000. But I left a ton of money on the table during the five years I ran that business.

### WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

What has really made me the most experienced business coach in the painting space is not what I did when I ran my own business — it is that I have coached so many painters, one by one, for so long. That experience has allowed me to become a librarian — an archive — of what really works.

Our current members average somewhere between \$2.5 million and \$3.9 million. Rural, suburban, the United Kingdom, Canada, Switzerland, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia — I've seen it all. And what I'm going to describe has worked in every market I've ever worked in, in every situation.



## SECTION THREE

## Key Concepts Before the Nuts & Bolts

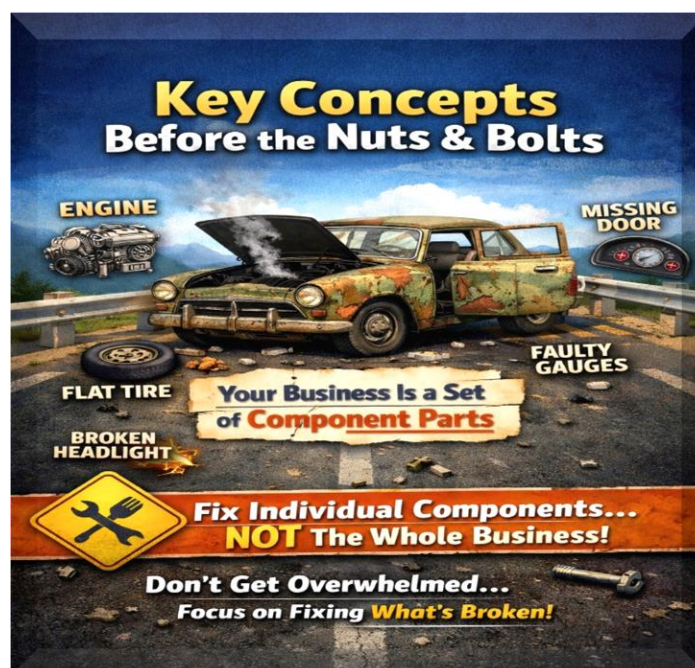
Before we talk about nuts and bolts, we need to talk about key concepts. If you understand concepts, they act like guardrails on a highway. You may bump between the rails, but you won't end up in the ditch. You won't end up in oncoming traffic.

### Your Business Is a Set of Component Parts

Your business is kind of like a car — not a pretty car, more like an old jalopy. A car is just a set of component parts assembled for a specific function. When I look at a painting business, I look at it the same way. If it's not doing well, it's because one of these component parts is either missing entirely or broken.

*If you have an issue in your painting business, don't worry about fixing 'the whole business.' You can't fix the whole business. You can only fix the individual components in the business.*

That is important. Don't let the enormity of fixing everything paralyze you from fixing something. Most often, something is missing, something is broken, and usually there are a few dozen things that need to be corrected.



## SECTION FOUR

# Income Benchmarks & Owner Income

A lot of times, people come to me and they do not even know what their income is. So let me give you some baseline numbers.

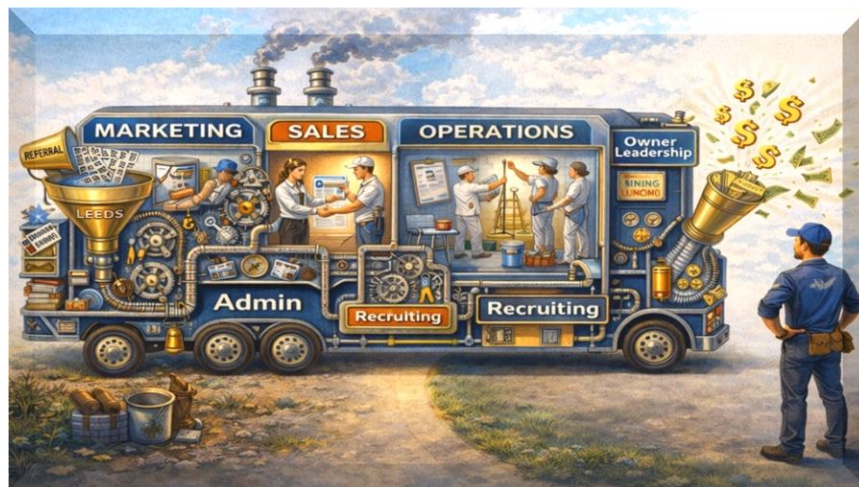
Each painter at roughly \$60,000 a year in wages should kick off about \$60,000 in gross profit. Think about this simply: each painter is like a little rental property that kicks off so much gross profit every year.



You really need to be at about 30% cash flow to owner. That means if you are running a \$1 million painting business, you should make \$300,000. I know a ton of people doing that. At \$2 million — 25% is still \$500,000. At \$3 million, people can still be at 30% — I see people doing \$3 million and making \$1 million. These percentages can be maintained as you scale to \$6 million, \$7 million, \$8 million, \$10 million, even \$15 million.

## What Owner Income Really Means

Owner income consists of salary, draws, cash you put under the mattress, insurance, and write-offs/benefits you run through the company. A painting business is simply a cash flow business. You do a project, subtract materials, subtract labor, subtract overhead. What's left is yours to keep. It is that simple.



## SECTION FIVE

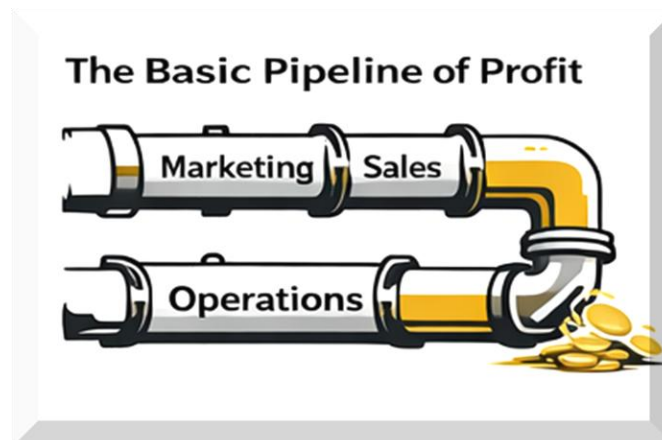
# The Basic Pipeline of Profit

You basically have three major places where money flows in your business:

- Marketing — everything that generates a lead, makes the phone ring, or makes a form field ding
- Sales — converts those leads into signed contracts
- Operations — if done properly, produces profitable projects

Then there is a feedback loop — reactivation and retention of past clients, follow-up with unconverted estimates, B2B referral sources, and commercial clients. As that list gets bigger, this loop grows and grows unless you cut it off. Many of you are cutting it off.

*What happens when you're not making money? Somewhere, somehow, you are choking off the flow of money to your bank account. We need every pipe bigger at every stage, because if there is a constriction anywhere in the pipeline, it will show up in your income.*



## SECTION SIX

# Process Improvement & Recurring Calendared Events

There are two major elements to changing a painting business.

## 1. Process Improvement

A process is something like job costing, production rates, the sales process, operations, or crew meetings – things you may already be doing, but perhaps not in a way that produces high levels of income or profit. Change it once and benefit from that improvement for the rest of your career. It usually takes very little money.

## 2. Recurring Calendared Events

One of the things I love about a painting business is that you do the same thing again and again. That means you can establish cadence and rhythm with your time blocking. If you just do these things consistently, they create momentum, opportunities, and fix problems.

Examples include:

- Client reactivation campaigns
- Newsletter marketing (physical mail and email)
- Crew meetings (weekly)
- Meetings with direct reports
- Operations, admin, and sales meetings

### THE CORE PRINCIPLE

When we talk about changing a painting business, we are really talking about two categories: better processes and better recurring calendared events. Everything else flows from these two pillars.



## SECTION SEVEN

# Millstones That Weigh a Business Down

## Poor Owner Time Management

A lot of painters show up every day and simply fight fires. They don't control their calendar. Poor painters use their calendar like a sponge. Rich painters use their calendar like a shield — they say, "We are only going to do things that make a lot of money or produce significant improvements in the business." When your time management is terrible, your painters' time management tends to be terrible too. It starts at the top and bleeds through the whole organization.

## No Accountability for Employees

A lot of owners put up with poor sales performance, poor operations management performance, and poor field performance because they are not tracking metrics and holding people accountable to them. When people are not hitting gross profit targets, not getting good customer satisfaction scores, or not following processes — something is broken.

## Bad Market Selection

New construction: the pay is slow, margins are low, risk is high, paperwork is through the roof, and there's no sellable equity. If I talk to 19 people serving new construction markets, maybe one is making good money. The rest are failing or underperforming badly. You cannot fix a bad market.

## Overpaying for Materials

All our big guys — doing \$3M, \$6M, \$10M, even \$25M — buy from one store. Professional painters should act like purchasing agents, not like panicked retailers who must have it in 10 minutes because they are disorganized.

## Lazy, Argumentative, Know-It-All Mindset

If your business is not doing well now, you cannot continue doing what you have always done and get a different outcome. Ask yourself: am I coachable, or am I clinging to a mindset that is keeping me poor?



## SECTION EIGHT

# Macro Metrics & Staffing

When I do a diagnostic, I put myself in your shoes. If I were feeding my family with your company, and I didn't like the financials, what would I do first, second, third, and fourth? Which systems would I tackle first? Which calendared events would I schedule immediately?

## The Macro Metrics I Look At

First, I look at your business mix — where is your revenue coming from? Are you tied up with one or two commercial accounts? That's risky. Then I look at your percentage of owner income relative to revenue, and how many weeks out you are booked. Some people are booked out forever but aren't making any money — they wear it as a badge of honor, but all it usually means is they are underpricing.

I also look at accounts receivable. If you are doing residential repaint, there should be almost no accounts receivable. And I want to know the condition of your operating account, because businesses die when they do not have enough cash to make payroll.

## Staffing Reality Check

A lot of owners think they have 16 painters, but when we do the math based on real sold hours, they only have eight and a half. I also want to know your admin, sales, and operations staff — and whether each role is contributing measurably to the company's profitability.



## SECTION NINE

# Owner Time Management

Once I understand the macro picture, I want to know whether you are time blocking. Can I see screenshots of your calendar? Are there specific times blocked for estimates, payroll, crew meetings, admin, follow-up, sales work, and working on the business?

*A lot of painters have nothing — either physical or digital — that captures everything they need to do. So their brain becomes a storage unit. That is a terrible way to live and a terrible way to operate.*

Your brain is like a computer. If you clog up the RAM with long-term storage, it serves up reminders at the worst possible moments. As a crew leader or field worker, being a firefighter may have been effective. But once you become an owner, your role has to change dramatically.

Do you have a project list and a next-action-item list? Do you have a planning process for both personal and business goals — something documented that shows how you are going to get from where you are to where you want to be? Often, all of this is missing.



## SECTION TEN

# Basic Technology Skills

Just because you don't believe something is important does not mean it isn't. Lack of basic technology skills is a major stumbling block. There are basic tools an owner must know how to use:

- A word processor and spreadsheet
- A CRM (customer relationship manager)
- Accounting software
- Basic communication apps — text, email, ringless voicemail

**THE CAUTION**

I see painters all the time who are covered up in technology — a thousand apps, no money. Technology should support fundamentals, not replace them. I have seen huge companies run on spreadsheets. I have seen people making a ton of money without even having a website. Understand fundamentals first.



## SECTION ELEVEN

# Operations: The Six Fundamental Systems

Operations are largely about two things: making sure your clients are happy and making sure you make money. I start with operations before marketing and sales for one reason — if you are already feeding jobs into the machine, I want to make sure the next three, four, five, or six jobs are profitable. That is the fastest way to improve cash flow.

## 1. Production Rates

Allow you to estimate accurately in a reproducible, teachable, scalable way. They tell you how many labor hours and gallons of paint a project requires. Without them, every estimator guesses differently. This is how painting franchises make an inexperienced person more accurate than someone who has been guessing for 20 years.

## 2. Job Costing

Controls behavior in the field so better outcomes happen in real time — not so you can look at stale data two weeks later. The crew leader must own and feel the budget. There must be a daily feedback loop. Without that, job costing is just accounting, not management.

## 3. Field Controls (Crew Leader Packet)

The information package that allows a crew leader to produce the job on budget, deliver high customer satisfaction, collect payment, and complete paperwork — without the owner having to start, monitor, and close every job. Operations must be run from a desk, not from a van.

## 4. Office Controls

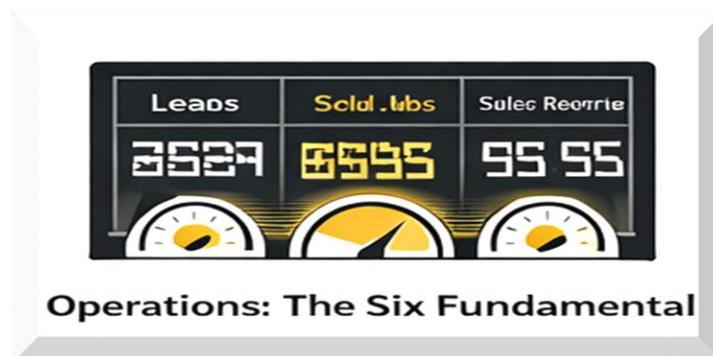
Project management and scheduling. There are about 30 things that happen from the time a project is signed to the time it is closed out. Everyone must know where the project stands — what is coming up, how many labor hours are sold, whether you need to recruit.

## 5. Agenda-Driven Crew Meetings

Create public accountability, build culture, and connect you to the field. Far more efficient than ad hoc tailgate conversations. When you stop doing this, the strings start unraveling.

## 6. Incentive Pay

Communicates that more productivity equals more pay, aligning company profits with painter behavior. Must be explained, reinforced, and made part of the culture — not just a software app. Includes public recognition, contests, and cultural reinforcement.



## SECTION THIRTEEN

## Marketing: First Referral / Second Transaction

You must build your painting business on the first referral and the second transaction. Focus on getting the second job with a client — it is often 60% larger than the first. Focus on getting the first referral — referrals are essentially free money.

### Net-New Leads: The Worst Investment First

Net-new leads come from total strangers. That's where everybody spends their money — and it is not the best place to spend it. Net-new leads have the lowest average transaction size, the lowest close rate, and the highest marketing and sales cost.

*If all you eat is net-new digital leads, you are cannibalizing your personal income through marketing expense. You want the percentage of net-new leads in your company to be as small as possible over time.*

### In-House List Reactivation

We teach clients to reactivate their lists twice a year — once heading into spring, once heading into winter. Multi-touch campaigns using direct mail, email, text, and phone calls — roughly 12 touches over 30 to 45 days. I have guys who pull hundreds of thousands of dollars out of their client list using this process.

### Newsletter Marketing & Operational Marketing

Between reactivation campaigns, consistent newsletter marketing keeps top-of-mind awareness high. And every job you run should produce roughly half an estimate request just through yard signs, door hangers, and review collection — executed by your painters while the job is happening. For many members at \$3M–\$6M, 12–15% of work comes from these simple operational tactics.

### B2B Referral Marketing

Think about people who are regularly inside homes or commercial properties: realtors, flooring installers, roofers, gutter installers, cabinet installers, maid services, landscapers, HVAC companies, plumbers, and electricians. We have guys making \$2,000 a day just patching holes behind HVAC, plumbing, and electrical work. B2B referrals often close at 50–55%.

### Commercial Repaint Marketing

When you get in with a facility manager who controls 2 or 3 million square feet and you become their painter of choice, there is very little competition inside that account. Ask most facility managers when the last time was that a painter called on them. Often, they say, "Never." Over time, if you are the one who keeps showing up, you become the de facto painter.

## SECTION EIGHTEEN

# Sales: Persuasion-Differentiation-Process

Most people think the sales process exists just to hand someone a price. That is not the goal. The goal of a sales call is to get the maximum transaction size, at the maximum ethical charge rate, at the optimal close rate, while differentiating yourself so well that the client is nervous about hiring the low-cost provider.

## Think Like the Client

From the client's point of view, this is a high-risk transaction. It is expensive, and there is low trust with painters. Your client is thinking: Will he show up? Are these men background-checked? What if something goes wrong? Is the warranty real? The sales process is largely about reducing risk and presenting value.

### THE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION PROCESS

We show up professionally with photo ID lanyards, client gifts, a structured diagnostic conversation, and a clear buy-in process. We leave a large social proof book full of testimonials, documentation, and evidence. We measure, estimate using production rates, print the estimate, handle objections, and ask for the sale in person. We do NOT simply email a PDF and hope.

The average American takes about 68 days to make a \$500 durable-goods purchase. Yet many owners will spend all day writing estimates and almost no time following up. You make far more money per hour from effective follow-up than from writing new estimates. And follow-up should not be impersonal CRM spam when the service is worth \$10,000, \$20,000, or \$25,000.

**Sales: Persuasion, Differentiation & Process**

Maximize Transaction Size at the Maximum Ethical Rate with the Optimal Close Rate

**Will He Show Up?**  
**Are They Background Checked?**  
**Is the Warranty Real?**

**Think Like the Client**

**Professional Sales Process**

- ▶ Photo ID & Gifts
- ▶ In-Home Presentation
- ▶ Social Proof & Testimonials
- ▶ Printed Estimate

**68 Days Decision Time:**

**Effective Follow-Up**  
 \$\$ More Profit \$\$

**No Impersonal CRM Spam**

**Personal Follow-Up**  
 Call Back & Close the Deal!

SECTION TWENTY

# Your Three Choices

| CHOICE 1: DO NOTHING   | CHOICE 2: DIY   | CHOICE 3: CALL BRANDON   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Probably 90% of people will do exactly this. They think that because they consumed information, something will magically change. It won't. Education without implementation is pointless. In fact, it's worse than pointless.</p> | <p>I very rarely see this work at the highest level. They're usually doing 20–40% of what is really needed. If you already had the expertise to solve it yourself, it would likely already be done.</p> | <p>We schedule a diagnostic. I diagnose the problems and opportunities in your painting business and provide a written report telling you exactly what I would do and in what order. Wealth is attracted to speed.</p> |

## What Makes Coaching Effective

You need experienced coaches — our coaches average roughly 29 years of experience each, former CEOs and COOs of national painting franchises. You need a good diagnosis, proper sequencing, real tools and templates, and accountability with a community of people who have already gotten where you want to go.

*I have had wives come up to me at events with tears in their eyes thanking me. I have had grown men cry because they grew up rough and tough and never thought they could make it — and now they are making more money than anybody they know.*

You still must set aside 4 to 8 hours a week to work on your business. There is no credit-card swipe that makes all these problems disappear overnight. If you won't invest that time, I cannot help you, and neither can anyone else.



## CLOSING

## Closing Encouragement

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I hope this has helped you get unstuck in your painting business. The only thing separating you from the vision of the painting business you actually want is your willingness to take a step. That step might be a phone call. It might be an email. It might be having the courage to request a diagnostic and then following through.

The systems work. The concepts work. The sequence matters. The discipline matters. And if you will stop trying to guess your way through this and start building your business with intention, structure, and accountability, then the kind of company you want is not some fantasy.

***It is achievable.***

**The Sky's the Limit.**

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**Brandon Lewis**

*Academy for Professional Painting Contractors*

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