

Want a more guided experience? Use the AI Playbook at ValueSmith.com/value-delivery-check.

START HERE · PREVIEW · SEPTEMBER 28, 2026

Pick one piece of work.

The one that's different: too much riding on it to afford a miss, and from where you're sitting, you can't see whether it's set up to deliver value that gets recognized. Run it the moment it lands, before you pour more into it.

**Five questions.
Three quick passes.
One Best Next Step.**

About 25 minutes of your time, from memory, no prep.

You'll know where the work stands and what to work on next.

PAGE 2

Pass 1 · Sketch

PAGE 3

Pass 2 · Evaluate

PAGE 4-6

Pass 3 · Validate

PAGE 7

Compare

PAGE 8-10

Best Next Step

Print this single-sided, grab a pen or your favorite writing tool, and line up someone you trust to read your answers. Then turn the page.

***This is a Preview.** It's been run on real work with other people, and what they found shaped this version. It's still changing. If you run it, I'd like to hear how it went and what you found: questions@valuesmith.com. Sharing is always your choice. Michael Santarcangelo*

Something not working? Same address. Questions and the current version:
ValueSmith.com/value-delivery-check.

PASS 1 • SKETCH**Value Delivery Check for:**

A few words: what you'd put on the calendar or call the file.

Get it out of your head.

From memory, a sentence or two each. Don't look anything up and don't polish. Your first answer is the point.

1. What problem are you trying to solve?

Not the solution you've already picked or been asked to deliver.

2. What does better tomorrow look like when this problem is solved?

Describe what is better for someone in that tomorrow—not the output, deliverable, or solution you plan to produce.

3. Who has to recognize this result as valuable?

Identify the specific people and roles whose judgment determines whether the result counts as business value—not just who benefits from it.

4. How do you know the people responsible for delivering the outcome and the people who must recognize the result share this picture of better tomorrow?

Point to inspectable evidence that they share what becomes better and for whom—not silence, attendance, approval, or lack of objection.

5. What is your path to value?

Connect the work, through what gets built or done, to the agreed beneficial outcome.

NEXT**Page 3: predict how your answers will land.**

PASS 2 • EVALUATE

Value Delivery Check for:

A few words: what you'd put on the calendar or call the file.

How will your answers land?

Read back what you wrote on Page 2. For each row, circle the number that matches **what's on the page**, not what you meant or could explain. It's a prediction, not a grade. There is no total.

Problem

The condition that needs to change is visible.

0 Not named

A request, solution or deliverable, not a problem.

1 Named

A problem is there, but loose or unbounded.

2 Demonstrated

Someone else would see the same problem without your context.

Outcome

Better tomorrow, and who benefits, is clear.

0 Not visible

Activity, output or a deliverable, not a change.

1 Partly visible

A change or who benefits, but too vague to tell if it happened.

2 Clear

What gets better, and for whom, clear enough to tell.

Recognizer

You can tell whose judgment makes the result valuable.

0 Abstract

A broad group, market or function, not people.

1 Located

You can see the group or level, not the people who decide.

2 Specific

The people and roles whose judgment decides are clear.

Agreement

Delivery and recognition share the same picture of better.

0 Assumed

No evidence they share the picture.

1 Partial

Some evidence, but not for everyone who matters.

2 Shared

Evidence shows they all share what gets better, and for whom.

Path

You can see how this work leads to that outcome.

0 Activity

Tasks and activity, with no route to the outcome.

1 Visible

A route is there, but important links are unclear.

2 Connected

Someone else can see how the work leads to the outcome.

Keep this page. Your reader doesn't see it.

NEXT

Page 4: hand it to someone.

PASS 3 • VALIDATE

Hand it to someone.

What's clear to you may not be clear to somebody else. This is the test, and it's what makes the check work.

- 1. Pick someone you trust to be straight with you,** who doesn't already know this work well enough to fill in the gaps.
- 2. Write the name of the work at the top of Pages 5 and 6.** Then give them your answers (Page 2) and their two pages (Pages 5 and 6). Keep your predictions (Page 3). Ask them for about 15 minutes: read your answers, answer three questions, and circle how your answers landed.
- 3. Answer no questions. Add no context.** Let the page do the work.
- 4. Choose what works best for you.** Sit with them while they talk it through and write down what you hear on Page 5, or let them write it up and hand it back. Either works.
- 5. When they're done, thank them and take both pages back.** Don't argue with what they got. The difference is the finding you'll work from to get to your Best Next Step.

You're not looking for approval. You're looking for where what was clear to you wasn't clear to somebody else. That's where you'll focus. It's a check on the page, never a verdict on you.

NEXT

Hand it off today, while it's fresh. When the pages come back, go to Page 7.

Value Delivery Check for:*Filled in by the person who wrote Page 2.*

Outside Read

For the reader. Use only the answers sketched on Page 2. The person who wrote them may be with you, but don't ask them to explain anything. Your candid reaction, with no further context or guidance, is exactly what they're checking. They aren't asking for approval. They're asking you to show them where it doesn't land.

1. What do you think this work is trying to accomplish, and how?

2. If this landed on you to deliver, what would you need to know? With no one there to answer, what would you have to assume?

3. Based on that, what would you likely deliver?

NEXT**Page 6: how did Page 2 do?**

Value Delivery Check for:

Filled in by the person who wrote Page 2.

How did Page 2 do?

Quickly, for each row, circle the number that matches what Page 2 showed you.

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2 Connected

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Want to run one of your own? ValueSmith.com/value-delivery-check

NEXT

Thank you. Hand both pages back.

WHAT CAME BACK

Value Delivery Check for:

A few words: what you'd put on the calendar or call the file. _____

Put the two reads together.

EXAMPLE	Yours (Page 3)			Theirs (Page 6)			
Problem	0	1	2	0	1	2	
Outcome	0	1	2	0	1	2	← Start here: the first row they didn't circle 2
Recognizer	0	1	2	0	1	2	
Agreement	0	1	2	0	1	2	← Surprise: you circled higher
Path	0	1	2	0	1	2	

Lay your predictions beside their read. Yours are on Page 3, theirs on Page 6. The rows line up.

- 1. **Look for the surprise.** Where did you circle higher than they did? That's where what was clear to you wasn't clear to them. If they circled higher than you, the page carried more than you thought.
- 2. **Make sense of it.** Read what they wrote on Page 5. It shows you what they got, and what they had to fill in.
- 3. **Then find where to start.** Going from the top, it's the first row they didn't circle 2. Each row rests on the one above it, so that's where you work first, even if a later row surprised you more. They circled 2 on every row? It's set up. Your Best Next Step is the next move on the work itself.

I'll start with: ☐ Problem ☐ Outcome ☐ Recognizer ☐ Agreement ☐ Path

What do you see now that you didn't see before?

BEST NEXT STEP

What makes a Best Next Step

A small, discrete action that unlocks progress. It isn't the fix. It's the smallest move that gets you unstuck on the row you ticked on Page 7.

A good one lets you say:

- 1. I know where to focus.
- 2. I know what I'm going to do.
- 3. I know why it matters.
- 4. I can start it myself.
- 5. And I'm going to do it.

An example. Say you're redesigning how new customers get started, and the row to start from was Problem. Three possible moves:

Too vague to act on	"Figure out what's wrong with onboarding."
An action, but still fuzzy	"Set up a meeting with the support lead to talk about onboarding."
One bounded move	"Ask the support lead which question new customers ask most in their first week that onboarding should have answered."

Yours will look nothing like this. It shows the difference between vague and small.

BEST NEXT STEP**Value Delivery Check for:**

A few words: what you'd put on the calendar or call the file.

Work it out.

1. Name the gap.

Look at the row you ticked on Page 7 and what your reader wrote on Page 5. What would someone need to see that isn't there yet?

2. Find the smallest move.

What's the smallest thing you could do to start closing that gap, something you can start yourself?

3. Say what it opens up.

If you did that, what could you do or decide that you can't right now?

BEST NEXT STEP

Value Delivery Check for:

A few words: what you'd put on the calendar or call the file. _____

Confirm it.

Check your move against these five. Circle one for each.

Right place	It works on the row you ticked on Page 7.	yes / not yet
One move	It is one bounded action, not a project.	yes / not yet
Useful	It unlocks something that isn't available now.	yes / not yet
Startable	You can start it yourself.	yes / not yet
Owned	You are actually going to do it.	yes / not yet

Any “not yet”? Go back to your move on Page 9 and make it smaller or more specific.

My Best Next Step

Still won't clear? What's in the way? That's a finding too.

YOU'RE DONE

Take the next step.

Keep these pages together. They hold what you wrote, what somebody else got from it and what you're going to do next.

Keep it.

This is the record of the check.

Share it.

If you go back for clarification, you don't go empty-handed: "Here's what I figured out. Help me make it better."

Run it again.

When this work changes, check it again. And use it on the next one that lands.

How did it go? I'd like to hear what you found: questions@valuesmith.com.

Sharing is always your choice.

Sometimes the situation needs another read.

If the check shows a gap you can't get your head around, or can't push back on alone, bring me your Value Delivery Check. We'll spend about 25 minutes looking at what it revealed, talking through what needs attention, and sharpening your Best Next Step.

It's a dialogue, not a pitch.

It's optional. Your check is complete without it.

Outsider perspective. Insider experience.

Talk with Michael at ValueSmith.com



 Reveals invisible work that drives visible wins

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