

The Help Map

Five places real help actually lives, filled in before the week you need it, not during it.

I did not have a map. I found Diane by accident, on a second visit to a program I had already written off once. I found the rest of it the same way, one piece at a time, always after going without it longer than I had to.

This is the map I wish I had built on an ordinary day. Five places real help actually lives, what each one gives you, where to start today, and a blank line to write your own answer next to it.

Fill it in now, while things are calm enough to think straight. It is not therapy, legal advice, or financial advice. It is a place to write down who you could call, before the week you actually need to.

01 Five places real help lives

Help for an owner rarely comes from one place. Fill in the last column now, while you can still think straight, not the week you actually need it.

TYPE OF HELP	WHAT IT ACTUALLY GIVES YOU	WHERE TO START TODAY	FREE	YOUR NOTE
SCORE mentor	A volunteer with real business experience, matched to you directly. Written into federal small-business law.	score.org - request a mentor	✓	
SBDC	Local, hands-on advising and workshops, usually tied to a state university. Covers a first business plan through a loan application.	Search your state name plus SBDC	✓	
A peer group or mastermind	People solving the same problems in real time, not after the fact.	Ask one business owner you respect how they found theirs	Varies	
Your own Diane	One person, more experience, more distance from your problem, and no stake in telling you what you want to hear.	Name someone this week	✓	
988	Someone to call or text right now, any hour, no appointment needed.	Call or text 988	✓	Already in your phone

02 How to actually sign up for SCORE

Knowing SCORE exists and using it are two different things. Here is the whole process, start to finish.

- 1 **Go to score.org.**
It is free. It is a federal program, not a sales funnel, and nobody there is trying to sell you anything.
- 2 **Request a mentor.**
You will answer a few questions about your business and where you are located.
- 3 **Get matched.**
Most mentors are retired executives volunteering their own time. There is nothing to buy and nothing to sign.

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Show up specific.

Bring one real decision, not a general feeling that something is wrong. Specific gets you further, faster.

03 The asking script

Pride is usually the real obstacle, not the lack of somewhere to ask. The fix is asking for one thing, not a rescue.

- ☐ **Name one thing.** "Can I talk through a decision with you for thirty minutes" gets a yes far more often than "I'm struggling." The first hands someone a job they can say yes to. The second hands them your fear with no instructions attached.
 - ☐ **Say the specific ask.** A gut check on a decision. An introduction to one person. Thirty minutes on a Tuesday.
 - ☐ **Follow up afterward.** Tell them what you did with the advice, even briefly. People keep helping the people who show them the help worked.
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04 Name your Diane

This is the assignment, not a suggestion. Do it this week, while things are calm enough to think straight.

- ☐ **The person:** someone with more experience, more distance from your problem, and no stake in telling you what you want to hear.
 - ☐ **What you would actually ask them:** one specific thing, not a rescue.
 - ☐ **When you will ask:** pick a day this week and write it down.
 - ☐ **If no one comes to mind:** go to score.org this week and request a mentor instead. That option exists specifically for this.
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How to use this. This is a thinking tool for identifying who is actually available to you. It is not therapy, legal advice, or financial advice, and it does not diagnose anything. Program names, websites, and eligibility change - verify SCORE and your state's SBDC directly before relying on them, as of July 2026.

If what you are carrying feels bigger than a business problem, 988 is the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, live since July 2022, free, staffed around the clock, and reachable by call, text, or chat. No appointment needed. It belongs on this map for the whole load, not only the business half of it.

How to use this. This is a thinking tool, built to help you reason about your own firm. It is not a compliance guarantee and it is not legal advice. Where it states a rule, it states the rule as of 2026-07, and the law moves, so confirm the current rules in your jurisdiction with your own counsel before you rely on anything here.

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