

Startup Field Guide (Revisited)

How to Build Something Real in a Noisy World

Bonus Materials

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Introduction

This collection is here to help you move.

The *Startup Field Guide Revisited* focuses on principles, patterns, and judgment because those endure. The materials that follow are practical by design. They are meant to help you turn insight into action, reduce friction, and keep momentum when the work gets real.

You will find three components in this guide.

The Modern Founder Stack

A living snapshot of the tools, platforms, and workflows I use to build, prototype, automate, communicate, and grow. The specific tools will change as the ecosystem evolves, but the intent remains the same: remove unnecessary complexity so you can focus on creating value.

Legal and Finance Essentials

A clear, founder-friendly foundation for setting up your company, managing equity, and maintaining financial hygiene. These basics are not glamorous, but getting them right early protects your energy and your future options.

The Field Notes Workbook

A complete set of the reflection prompts and exercises from the book, gathered in one place. Use it to track your thinking, notice patterns in your decisions, and see how you are evolving as a builder over time.

You do not need to use everything here. Few founders do.

The goal is not to adopt a full stack or follow a prescribed path. It is to choose a small set of tools and practices that support focus, learning, and steady progress.

Return to these materials when you need them. Set them aside when you do not.

Tools can accelerate the work.

Judgment directs it.

Clarity is what compounds.

The Modern Founder Stack (2nd Edition)

Tools, platforms, and systems for building something real faster and smarter.

The tools have changed, but the fundamentals haven't.

You still need to **understand your user, build quickly, learn continuously, and communicate clearly.**

These modern platforms remove friction so you can stay focused on what matters: building value, not infrastructure.

1. Build and Prototype

Purpose	Tools	Notes
Design & Prototyping	Figma, Balsamiq, Google Stitch	Figma remains the gold standard for collaboration, but Balsamiq for wireframes is a personal favorite.
No-Code / Low-Code Apps	Webflow, Softr, Bubble, Glide, Typedream	Perfect for shipping early versions without engineers. Choose Webflow for polished sites, Softr for dashboards, Glide for mobile-style MVPs.
AI Builders	Gemini Code Assist, ChatGPT, Claude, Replit AI, Vercel v0, Cursor	Use AI to brainstorm features, generate copy, or even code starter templates. The key: use it to accelerate thinking, not replace it.
Workflow Automation	IFTTT, Zapier, Make (Celonis)	Connect your stack. Automate data flow, user onboarding, and notifications.

2. Ship and Host

Purpose	Tools	Notes
Hosting / Deployment	Vercel, Netlify, Fly.io, Render	Fast, developer-friendly, and globally distributed.
Databases	Supabase, Firebase, Neon, PlanetScale	Choose Supabase for simplicity and authentication out of the box.
Analytics	PostHog, Amplitude, Mixpanel	Start small: retention, engagement, and referrals matter most early on.
Feedback & Session Replay	Hotjar, FullStory, Highlight	Observe behavior. Pair with conversations to learn <i>why</i> .

3. Communicate and Collaborate

Purpose	Tools	Notes
Docs & Knowledge	Google Docs, Notion, Coda	Centralize everything. Treat writing as the backbone of your operating system.
Async Communication	Slack, Twist, Loom	Fewer meetings. More writing. Short Looms save hours.
Project Management	Basecamp, Linear, Height, Trello, ClickUp	Pick one that your team will actually use. Keep it simple.
Community / Early Users	Discord, Circle, Geneva, Skool	Create a space where your first 100 users can talk with you directly.

4. Operate and Scale

Purpose	Tools	Notes
Finance & Accounting	Mercury, Brex, Ramp, Pilot, Relay	Mercury for banking simplicity. Pilot for bookkeeping.
Cap Table & Equity	Carta, Pulley, AngelList Stack	Set this up early. Clarity around ownership builds trust.
Hiring & Payroll	Gusto, Deel, Rippling	Make compliance automatic. Focus your energy elsewhere.
Legal / Incorporation	Clerky, Firstbase, Stripe Atlas	Fast, standardized, and founder-friendly.
Customer Support	Zendesk, Intercom, HelpScout, Tidio	Combine AI support with real human touch. Empathy scales best.

5. Grow and Tell the Story

Purpose	Tools	Notes
Content Creation	Canva, Descript, CapCut, Runway, Midjourney	Make visual storytelling effortless. Iterate on tone and message.
Email & CRM	ConvertKit, HubSpot, Customer.io, Substack	Choose simple tools that grow with you. Start building your list early.
Analytics for Growth	Google Analytics, Mixpanel, Fathom Analytics	Build dashboards that reveal insight, not vanity.
Community Platforms	Substack, LinkedIn, X (Twitter), YouTube, Reddit	Build in public. Authenticity > algorithms.

Principle to Remember:

Tools don't create momentum. Clarity does.

Pick a small, cohesive stack that reduces friction and lets you focus on people, not process.

Legal and Finance Essentials for Modern Founders

Legal and finance don't need to be overwhelming. They just need to be clear. Here's a simplified foundation to keep your startup protected, compliant, and ready for scale. The best choice of business structure depends on your company's goals, funding strategy, and growth trajectory. Here are common industry practices:

1. Forming the Company

Structure:

- For U.S. startups planning to raise capital, the default is a **Delaware C-Corporation**, though as of late a lot of companies are moving to Texas. This is the structure investors expect, and it provides the cleanest legal foundation for issuing equity, raising money, and operating at scale.
- For independent creators or small SaaS founders, an **LLC** in your own state may offer simplicity.

Tools to Use:

- Services like **Clerky**, **Stripe Atlas**, and **Firstbase** handle incorporation, bylaws, and EIN setup.
- Keep original documents organized in Notion, Google Drive, or Dropbox with clear version history.

Founder Agreements:

- Clearly define equity splits *upfront*.
- Use standard **vesting** (4 years, 1-year cliff).
- Have each founder sign **IP assignment** to the company.

A few pages of legal clarity early can prevent years of pain later.

2. Protecting Intellectual Property

- **Trademarks:** Protect your brand name and logo once you launch publicly.
- **Copyrights:** Automatically apply to original work, but register key assets for extra protection.
- **Patents:** File only if your invention is novel and defensible, not every idea needs one.
- Use **DocuSign** or **Adobe Sign** for all contracts to maintain audit trails.

3. Managing Equity and Cap Table

- Use **Carta** or **Pulley** to issue and track equity, options, and SAFEs.
- If raising funds, always maintain a single source of truth for ownership.
- Educate every employee on what their equity *means*. Transparency builds loyalty.

4. Finance Hygiene

Banking:

- Open a dedicated business account (e.g., **Mercury**, **Relay**). Never mix personal and company funds.

Accounting:

- Use **Pilot**, **QuickBooks Online**, or **Xero** for bookkeeping.
- Track expenses weekly, not quarterly.
- Hire a part-time CPA early. They're cheaper than fixing mistakes later.

Taxes:

- File on time, even when pre-revenue.
- Keep receipts for at least three years.
- Consider **R&D credits** and early-stage tax advantages.

5. Fundraising and Investor Readiness

If you raise capital, keep these principles in mind:

- Always understand *why* you're raising. More money amplifies both strengths and mistakes.
- Use standard instruments: **SAFE** (Y Combinator's Simple Agreement for Future Equity) or **Convertible Note**.
- Keep investor updates short, honest, and consistent.
- Track burn and runway monthly.

Investors respect clarity and discipline more than hype.

6. Contracts and Clarity

- Every relationship including partners, vendors, and contractors deserves a written agreement.
- Define scope, timelines, deliverables, and ownership rights.
- Use **standard templates** from reliable sources like Y Combinator's open docs, or consult a startup attorney.

If it matters, write it down.
If it's written down, honor it.

7. Founder Health and Risk Protection

- Set boundaries: you aren't the company.
- Get **health insurance** through your company once incorporated.
- Consider **founder liability protection** and **D&O insurance** as you scale.
- Document vacation, parental leave, and mental health norms early because it sets the tone for the culture.

Principle to Remember:

*Legal and finance work exist to protect your freedom, not limit it.
The goal is clarity so you can keep your energy focused on creation.*

Field Notes Workbook

Each chapter in the *Startup Field Guide Revisited* book ends with **Field Notes** which are reflection prompts and small, actionable steps designed to move you from concept to clarity.

This workbook brings them together in one place so you can track your progress over time.

Print it, duplicate it, or keep it in a physical notebook.

The point is to *see yourself building*.

Part I: The Internal Journey

Chapter 1: Becoming a Founder

- What problem or pattern keeps tugging at your attention?
- What is the smallest step you could take this week to explore it?
- What fear shows up when you think about starting, and what is it trying to protect?

Chapter 2: Choosing a Problem Worth Solving

- List three frustrations you've experienced recently.
- Who else feels that frustration, and how often?
- Write one sentence: *People who [audience] struggle to [pain] because [reason].*

Chapter 3: Turning Insight Into a Product

- What is the smallest useful version of your idea?
- How could you simulate it manually before writing code?
- What would learning look like after one week?

Chapter 4: Understanding Your Customer

- Who are your five most engaged users or potential users?
- What emotions drive their pain such as frustration, fear, boredom, or pride?
- What did you learn from your last user conversation that surprised you?

Chapter 5: Building Emotional Endurance

- What restores your energy when you're drained?
- What daily habits keep you centered?

- What does “enough” look like right now financially, emotionally, and creatively?

Part II: The External Journey

Chapter 6: Finding Your First Users

- Where do your users already spend time online?
- Who can introduce you to your first ten potential customers?
- How will you celebrate your first 100 real users?

Chapter 7: Product-Market Fit

- How do users describe your product in their own words?
- What metrics or behaviors prove they care?
- If your product disappeared tomorrow, who would notice first?

Chapter 8: Building the Team

- What are your top three non-negotiable values?
- Which roles or strengths do you lack right now?
- How do you build trust daily?

Chapter 9: Leadership in Uncertainty

- What kind of energy do you want your team to feel from you?
- When was the last time you paused before reacting?
- Who gives you feedback you can trust?

Chapter 10: Systems and Scale

- Which process breaks most often, and why?
- What could you automate or document this week?
- What are your five most important metrics?

Part III: The Continuous Journey

Chapter 11: Growing Without Losing the Center

- What habits help you stay grounded during growth?
- What would “sustainable success” look like for you?
- What should you start saying no to more often?

Chapter 12: The Long Game

- What principle do you want your company to embody long after you’re gone?
- How will you define success in ten years, not by scale but by impact?

Chapter 13: Staying Human in a Machine World

- What parts of your process must always remain human?
- How do you balance efficiency with empathy?
- What is your personal code for how you'll use AI responsibly?

Chapter 14: The Future of Building

- How will you use technology to create more meaning, not just more output?
- What future problem are you uniquely positioned to solve?

Chapter 15: The Courage to Begin and Continue

- What is one new beginning you feel called to start?
- What would “continuing” look like if you stopped forcing it?
- What kind of founder, and person, do you want to become next?

Principle to Remember:

Every builder needs to practice reflection.

*Products grows through iteration.
So do you.*

*Write.
Review.
Adjust.
Repeat.*

That's how you build something real inside and out.

A Final Note

I occasionally work with founders and teams who want help thinking through what they are building, how they are building it, or what comes next.

That work usually takes the form of advising, consulting, or speaking engagements focused on product strategy, early traction, and building with clarity in noisy environments. I tend to work best with people who value judgment, reflection, and steady progress over shortcuts.

If you have a question, are feeling stuck, or think a conversation might be useful, you can reach me through my website:

www.seancallahan.com

No obligation. No pitch.
Just an open door.