RALLYCALL

Designed to Carry.

A founder's field guide to the story that raises the round, wins the customer and survives the press. Ten chapters. Ten worksheets. One sentence you've been circling.

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BEFORE WE START

Your product is working. Your story isn't selling.

Most founders I meet are in some version of the same spot. The demo is crisp. The metrics point up and to the right, or at least up and slightly to the side. Then someone at a dinner asks what the company does, and the founder answers for four minutes, and the person who asked nods the way people nod at a waiter reciting the specials.

Nobody in that scene did anything wrong. The founder knows the product too well to describe it from the outside, which is the one vantage point every listener occupies. The story got built the way most startup stories get built, one investor question and one customer objection at a time, until it became a long answer to a short question.

I've spent fifteen years in those rooms. In 2010 I wrote the line Waze carried all the way to its $1.1B sale to Google. I wrote BeeHero's tagline and its fundraising decks, launched the fourth version of Moovit, and helped Spire Health turn from a consumer gadget into a medical device company. The teams I've worked alongside have raised more than $650M, scaled four unicorns and closed a dozen exits.

This guide is the course I teach, compressed. Ten chapters, each built around a room where your story gets tested: the pitch, the sales call, the newsroom, the all-hands after a pivot. Each one ends with a worksheet, because a story you haven't written down is a mood.

The last page puts all ten on one sheet. Fill it in, and you'll have the outline of every deck, homepage and press release you write this year.

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01

From "interesting" to "where do I sign"

Every founder hears two sentences. The first is "interesting product," said warmly, with eye contact, and it means nothing. The second is some version of "where do I sign," and it's rarer than it should be.

The distance between those sentences is belief, and the product rarely closes it alone. An investor wiring money, a customer switching vendors, an engineer leaving a comfortable job to join you for less: each of them is betting on a future that doesn't exist yet. Features describe the present. A story is how people get to see the future before it shows up.

Emotion is the part founders like to hand to marketing, as if it were the soft stuff. It's the part that moves the hand toward the pen. People decide with feeling and defend the decision with a spreadsheet afterward. (Ask anyone who has bought a car.)

The less glamorous truth is that the story lives far outside the deck. It's in every pitch, launch and onboarding call. Your head of sales tells it forty times a week. Your support team tells it at the worst possible moment. When each of them tells a slightly different version, what you have is a set of rumors.

When I joined Waze in 2010, the app was a better map than the maps, and very few people cared. Google Maps and Garmin owned the category, and "crowdsourced real-time navigation" is a phrase that makes listeners check their phones. The product was ahead. The story hadn't caught up. Chapter eight covers how that got fixed.

WORKSHEET 01

1. What problem do you solve, in the words your customer would use at dinner?
2. What changes for them afterward?
3. What would someone need to believe about the future to bet on you today?

02

Problem, promise, process, proof

Every story that has worked on me across a pitch table had four parts. Most of the ones that didn't were missing one, and usually the same one.

PROBLEM. Start where the audience already hurts. Moovit began with something every commuter has felt: standing at a stop, reading a schedule with the confidence of scripture and the accuracy of a horoscope. Nobody needed transit frustration explained. They needed it named.

PROMISE. Describe the world after the problem is gone. BeeHero's promise lived in the tagline: Pollinate & Prosper. Healthy hives, fuller orchards, and a grower who stops gambling on bees nobody can see inside of.

PROCESS. Explain how you get there in language a smart outsider can repeat. "Proprietary multimodal sensor fusion" is a process. "Drivers share what they see on the road, so everyone gets home faster" is a process someone can explain to their spouse.

PROOF. Numbers, customers, and third parties with no reason to flatter you. Spire Health's credibility came from clinical work and the long road toward FDA clearance, the kind of proof a press release can't fake.

> **The missing part is almost always proof or promise.**

Engineers skip the promise because it feels like bragging about the future. Marketers skip the proof because the numbers seem boring. The audience notices both, and fills the gap with whatever they assumed walking in.

WORKSHEET 02

1. Write one sentence each for problem, promise, process and proof.
2. Read the four aloud, in order.
3. If one of them sounds like a different company, rewrite that one first.

03

The investor room

An investor's job is to be wrong most of the time and spectacularly right once. A pitch for a tidy, sensible product with tidy, sensible prospects is asking them to do that job badly.

They're scanning for the one outcome big enough to pay for all the misses. Five moves get a story from tidy to fundable.

SIZE THE PROBLEM IN THEIR UNITS. The commuter's frustration from chapter two becomes, in this room, everyone who rides a bus and every city paying to run one. Same pain, new unit of measurement.

SHOW THE INSIGHT NOBODY ELSE HAS. Waze saw that drivers stuck in traffic were the data. Every other navigation company was buying maps. Waze was growing one.

LEAD WITH THE OUTCOME. BeeHero's investors were buying more almonds per acre. The sensors in the hives were how. The yield was why.

GIVE EVERY METRIC A COMPARISON. A number standing alone is decoration. Spire tied fewer hospital visits to what those visits cost, which turned a clinical metric into a business case.

CLOSE WITH PROOF. Traction, partnerships, the customer who renewed without being asked. This is the slide that lets a partner defend you on Monday morning, in the meeting that decides your round. You aren't invited to that meeting.

BeeHero went on to raise $64M, including a $42M Series B. The decks changed a great deal between rounds. The promise stayed exactly where it was.

WORKSHEET 03

1. The opportunity, measured in the investor's unit.
2. Your insight, in one sentence a competitor would argue with.
3. The proof a partner could repeat in a meeting you won't attend.

04

Your customer is the lead

Founders like being the hero of the company story, which is fair, since they did most of the suffering. Customers have their own story, and they've already cast themselves in the lead.

In that story the problem is the villain, and your product, if you're lucky, shows up in the second act as the guide with useful advice. The guide matters enormously. The guide also never gets the final scene.

People buy who they get to become. The commuter buys the feeling of being the one person on the platform who knew the train was late. The grower buys a bloom season without the 3 a.m. dread. Specs help them justify the purchase to someone else.

Waze made this explicit. Drivers who reported accidents and speed traps became part of a crew beating traffic together, and people who had never written a product review in their lives would pull over to flag a pothole for strangers. The story had made them the protagonist, so they behaved like one.

Before. The specific bad day, told in the customer's words.

Turn. What your product does, briefly, standing slightly out of the light.

After. What they get to stop doing, and who they get to be.

Pick the emotion your customer already carries into the conversation, then tell the before and after in that order.

WORKSHEET 04

1. Describe one real customer on the worst day of the problem.
2. What do they want to feel instead?
3. What does your product let them stop doing?

05

Partners and press

The core of your story should never change. The order you tell it in should change constantly, depending on who's sitting across the table.

PARTNERS ask one question for the entire meeting, whether or not they say it aloud: what does this do for me? BeeHero told one story to three kinds of partners and led with a different part each time. Agribusiness heard profitability. Sustainability groups heard pollinator health. Technology partners heard the data. Nobody was misled. Each of them got their chapter first.

REPORTERS ask a different question: why would my readers care today? They have a story to file and an editor who is already skeptical. Give them a hook that's new and a person who's affected by it. Waze's hook was the community, thousands of strangers helping each other get home, which made a better headline than any feature release. BeeHero's was the grower whose livelihood rode on bees nobody could see inside of.

> **Reporters can smell an investor deck through an email attachment. They also don't open attachments.**

The fastest way to lose either room is to tell your story in your own order of importance. Partners hear a vendor. Reporters hear a press release. Both have read plenty of those this week.

WORKSHEET 05

1. Pick three partners or outlets you want this year.
2. Write down what each one gets graded on by their boss.
3. Rewrite your first paragraph three times, once for each scorecard.

06

Four feelings that move people

Features get evaluated. Feelings get acted on. Most startup stories reach for one emotion, usually excitement, and then wonder why the room stays polite.

Four feelings do the heavy lifting.

FEAR. The cost of doing nothing, made concrete. For a grower, it's an orchard that blooms and doesn't set fruit because the hives were weak and nobody knew. BeeHero didn't need to dramatize it. Growers had already lived it.

FRUSTRATION. The daily inefficiency people stopped noticing because they accepted it. Moovit's whole story sat in the minutes at a bus stop wondering whether the bus had already come.

HOPE. The specific version of things getting better. Waze promised a commute shorter than yesterday's, a modest promise, which is exactly why people believed it.

ASPIRATION. Who your customer gets to be. The clinician who catches the respiratory decline before it becomes an admission. The driver who knows the shortcut.

Handle fear carefully. A little makes people pay attention. A lot makes them close the tab. The stories that work tend to open on fear or frustration, close on hope, and let aspiration do the quiet work in between.

WORKSHEET 06

1. Rank the four feelings for your audience.
2. Find the sentence in your current pitch that carries each one.
3. If your top-ranked feeling has no sentence, that's the next one you write.

07

The pivot story

Every startup changes direction at least once, and most founders tell that story as though they're confessing to something. The investor hears it, the team hears it, and everyone quietly lowers their estimate of the next plan.

Told well, the same pivot is evidence that the company learns faster than it spends. Three moves get it there.

SAY IT FIRST. Name what didn't work, plainly, before anyone has to ask. Transparency that arrives late reads as a cover-up.

CONNECT IT TO THE MISSION. Show how the new direction follows from the old purpose, so it reads as the next step in the same walk.

SHOW WHAT IT UNLOCKED. The market, the customer or the scale that was out of reach before.

BeeHero started out helping beekeepers run healthier hives. Then the company looked at who paid for pollination and who lost the most when it failed. The purpose stayed put: healthier bees, better harvests. The customer and the scale changed, from individual beekeepers to pollination across entire growing operations. Told that way, the pivot is the moment the company found where its mission was worth the most.

Spire Health made a bigger turn, from consumer wearable to medical device company with a professional program behind it, and that path led to its acquisition by Wellinks in 2024. The consumer chapter stayed in the story, as the reason the sensors were good enough to bring into a clinic.

WORKSHEET 07

1. Write your pivot in three sentences: what you saw, what you learned, what it unlocked.
2. If the first sentence blames the market, start over.

08

Outsmarting Traffic, Together

Some products get used. A few get joined. You can tell which one you have when customers start telling your story for you, unprompted, and slightly better than you would.

In 2010 I was Waze's first in-house communications strategist, facing a problem I've seen many times since. The product was remarkable, a live map built by the people driving on it. The positioning made it sound like a utility. Utilities get used. Nobody joins one.

The breakthrough came when I stopped thinking about Waze as a map and started seeing a group of people helping each other beat the same commute. That became three words, each with a job.

Outsmarting said the drivers were smarter than gridlock, and so were you.

Traffic named the enemy, the one thing every driver on earth agrees about.

Together was the point. The app worked only because millions of drivers chose to share what they saw.

The line went into the app stores, the campaigns and the headlines, and it was still there when Google bought the company for $1.1B in 2013.

A rallying cry needs three things: a mission one level above the product, a short line that names the enemy and the team, and something for people to do. BeeHero asked growers to share their own results, which turned each customer into the proof for the next one.

(The agency's name comes from this chapter. It seemed rude not to.)

WORKSHEET 08

1. What is the mission one level above your product?
2. Who or what is the shared enemy?
3. What can a customer do this week that makes them part of it?

09

One story, many feeds

Once the story works in a room, it has to survive the internet, where nobody sits still and everyone is holding something else.

Consistency is the goal. Sameness is the trap. One paragraph pasted into LinkedIn, Instagram, a newsletter and a conference abstract reads like a company that owns exactly one paragraph.

BeeHero showed the bees and the bloom on Instagram, because a hive photographs better than a dataset, and published pollination data on LinkedIn, where the people who buy pollination were reading. The story held steady while the evidence changed to fit the feed.

LEAVE ROOM FOR REPLIES. The channels that work best are the ones where your audience writes a chapter. Waze's community wrote most of its own marketing, one reported traffic jam at a time.

LET THE NUMBERS ARGUE WITH YOU. Which version earned the reply, the forward, the booked meeting? Keep that one. Retire the version you love that nobody answers. This is harder than it sounds, and the version you love will put up a fight.

WORKSHEET 09

1. Pick two channels you'll commit to this quarter.
2. For each, note who's reading and what they're doing when they see you.
3. Choose the proof that fits that moment, then write the same story twice.

10

The founder tells it first

Eventually every investor, reporter and senior hire asks the same thing in different words: why you? That answer can't be outsourced, and I say so as someone paid to write most of the rest.

YOUR WHY is the moment the problem became personal, told as a scene with a time and a place.

YOUR VALUES are the decisions you already made when they cost you something. Those are the only values anyone believes.

YOUR VISION is where this goes if it works, described specifically enough that a reasonable person could disagree with it.

The founders I've watched raise well tell the origin story they actually have, plainly, the same way each time, and let it improve a little with every telling. By the fortieth pitch the story knows where the laughs are.

Then they hand it to the team. A founder story that lives only in the founder's head stops working the day the company outgrows the founder's calendar, which, if things go well, happens sooner than anyone planned.

WORKSHEET 10

1. Why did you start this? One scene, with a time and a place.
2. What have you refused to do, even when it would have been easier?
3. Where does the company stand in five years if everything goes right?

THE ONE-PAGE STORY

Your company, on a single sheet.

Print it. Fill it in with a pen. Every deck, homepage and press release you write this year should trace back to something on this page.

PROBLEM

Where it hurts, in the customer's words.

PROMISE

The world after the problem is gone.

PROCESS

How you get there, in a sentence a spouse could repeat.

PROOF

The number or name nobody can argue with.

INSIGHT

What you see that competitors don't.

THE FEELING

Fear, frustration, hope or aspiration. Pick one to lead.

RALLYING CRY

The enemy, the team, the line.

WHY YOU

The scene where it became personal.

THE SENTENCE

What your company does, in under ten words, that your engineers would sign off on.

RALLYCALL

Ten pages of notes. Same pitch on Monday.

That's where most worksheets end up, and nobody deserves blame for it. The hardest part of a startup story is hearing it the way a stranger hears it, and the founder is the one person in the building who can't.

That's the work at RallyCall. I sit side by side with founders, investors and civic leaders to find the sentence the company has been circling, then build the deck, the positioning and the launch around it.

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4
UNICORNS SCALED

12
CLIENT EXITS

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If your product is working and your story isn't selling, send me the deck. I'll tell you where it loses the room.

Book a story review

30 minutes. Bring the deck you're least sure about.

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