

TIMO AHOPELTO & JYRI ENGSTRÖM

THE Startup HANDBOOK



TAMMI



TIMO AHOPELTO & JYRI ENGSTRÖM

*THE
Startup
HANDBOOK*

Translated by Ian Fenton



TAMMI

HELSINKI



Startup
Foundation

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The Founders' Song

I hear the sound
of startups sprouting fast,
and mouths
foaming at Slush with pride.
I believe
that dreams are changing now –
into real talk, slides, and the startup stride.

I know how
hardships strike the ground,
but I'll weather the storm and stand tall.
I endure
the pain and the mess –
for only a founder can take it all.

I feel
the hammer of passion pound,
as I birth a product from thin air.
With joy,
not even the coldest night
can dull the warmth we founders share.

1.

IDEA AND FOUNDING

HOW DO YOU START A STARTUP?

Starting a company is easy:

- ✓ File the company in your local jurisdiction, and in the most countries it is very easy.
- ✓ Open a bank account.

Congratulations. You're a founder.

But this book isn't about just any company – it's about **startups**. Those that aim for rapid growth and global breakthrough. If everything goes right, your startup might become the world leader in its field.

The journey, however, is anything but straightforward. In a founder's daily life, the only certainties are constant uncertainty – and that thrilling feeling when you realize you're building something real and solving a problem that truly matters.

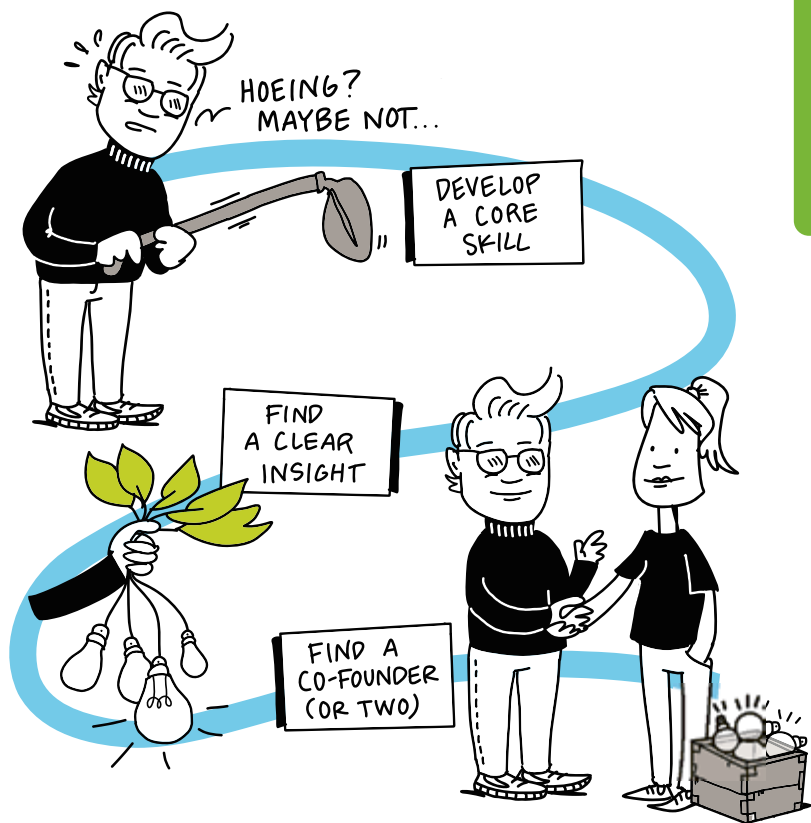
So before you fill out any paperwork, make sure you've got a few basics covered:

- ✓ **Develop a core skill.** Pick a field you want to work in – and learn it so well that only a handful of people in the world know it better than you.

Sound impossible? You'll get there.

Learning starts with curiosity and grows when you surround yourself with people who know more than you. Once you understand how things work – and can build something tangible – you're one step closer to becoming a startup founder.

- ✓ **Find a clear insight.** Your insight must be true – but not yet widely used. It should be something that could grow into a billion-dollar business if successful. And something that gets you out of bed in the morning, even when things feel hopeless.



- ✓ **Find a co-founder (or two).** You can succeed alone, but it's far more likely together. Choose your co-founder like you'd choose a life partner.

A startup is like mountaineering: the journey is long, the slope steep, and conditions unpredictable. You can't see the summit – only the next step. Sometimes you won't know what to do, the direction will be unclear, or the team will waver. In those moments, there's only one way forward: make decisions and act.

Most startups don't fail because of mistakes – they fail because founders don't correct the company's course in time. You'll hear this again and again, in different words: according to Marianne Vikkula from Wolt, *"motion is the potion."* Elon Musk of Tesla emphasizes the importance of a fast feedback loop. And Marc Andreessen, one of Netscape's founders, says the secret to success is *"strong beliefs, weakly held"* – firm convictions that you're willing to let go of when the situation changes.

You won't guess everything right at the start. And you don't have to.

When Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay climbed Mount Everest for the very first time, they didn't know

the exact route or when the weather would turn deadly. When the moment came, they moved fast – adjusting constantly, together.

Building a startup is the same: stumbling forward under pressure. You won't know the exact steps or timing. No one does.

So how do you move forward? Quickly. One step at a time.

Are you ready?

Good. Let's begin.



CORE SKILL – THE MOST VALUABLE ASSET OF A STARTUP FOUNDER

Every founder needs something others don't have. It could be technical skill, a sharp eye for products, or the guts to make the first sale when nothing's ready.

This ability is your currency. It builds trust and attracts a team that complements you.

Core skill doesn't require a degree or title. It might come from childhood, school, work, or passionate hobbies – usually a mixture.

Founders often fall into one of three types: technical, product, or commercial.

A technical founder masters the technological core of the product. They don't just understand the tech – they build it themselves. Top-tier technology doesn't come from ready-made blocks. It's crafted by hand, one detail at a time. And this is exactly where the technical founder shines.

Deep mastery of technology often comes from a mix of studying, working, and curious tinkering. If you want

to become a technical founder, start your own hobby projects around things that interest you.

EXAMPLE: The founders of smart ring company Oura built their first ring from scratch, right down to the circuit board.

A product founder has a clear vision of what's being built – and why. They have the ability to turn their vision into a tangible, usable solution. They can spot the customer's need before the customer can even put it into words. They know which details are critical – and which can be left out.

A product founder doesn't just build a product. They build a world. According to Mikko Koskinen, founder of Kyrö Distillery, a product founder “creates a world that people want to be part of.”

You become a product founder by being curious about products, how they are built – and the needs they serve. If you want to become one, actively seek out new products and start using them. Think about why they were built the way they are – and how they could be improved.

EXAMPLE: Miki Kuusi wanted to build a world where you could order anything with your phone. He led the development of Wolt's early prototypes down to the last detail – from UI to courier experience.

A commercial founder sees how an insight turns into cash flow. They already have a customer on the line while others are still sketching on the whiteboard. They build customer relationships, media presence, and funding around the product – even before the product exists.

Often, their role evolves into that of an **operator**: someone who makes sure everything works, customers get answers, and things move forward. A commercial founder might not write code, but without them, the company's bank account would be empty and nothing would move.

EXAMPLE: Tuomas Rasila wasn't just a tech genius – he built demand around his drone defense startup Sensofusion, bringing in the Finnish Defence Forces, the authorities, and a range of international clients.

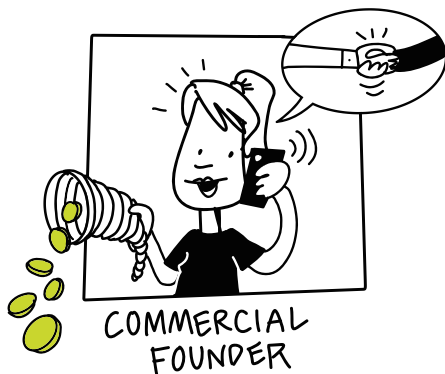
Maybe by now you've noticed that you've got a bit of every founder type in you. Some technical skill. A sense



TECHNICAL
FOUNDER



PRODUCT FOUNDER



COMMERCIAL
FOUNDER

for what a good product feels like. A drive to sell, to convince the skeptics, and to get things moving.

It might also be that your founder type only becomes clear once the team is in place.

Or that you'll discover it along the way.

It's time to get started. The rest will figure itself out.

READY TO KICK OFF YOUR STARTUP JOURNEY?

The *Startup Handbook* is the essential guide for anyone dreaming of building their own company.

Packed with practical tips, real-world examples, and playful illustrations, it takes you inside the world of startups with entrepreneurial savvy and a dash of humor. Whether you're a student, a first-time founder, or just curious about entrepreneurship, this book shows you exactly how to go from idea to execution.

You'll learn how to develop a raw idea into a product people love, secure funding, win customers, and lead your team – broken down into clear, no-fluff steps.

This is the perfect companion for anyone who wants to launch a company and give it a real shot at becoming the next unicorn.

Authors **Timo Ahopelto** and **Jyri Engeström**, seasoned entrepreneurs and venture capitalists, share their own hard-won lessons along with stories from successful startups. Their advice isn't theory – it's been tested in the trenches of real companies.

“Starting a startup? Congratulations – you’ve just found an unbeatable cheat code.”

– ILKKA PAANANEN, SUPERCELL

“I don’t know a better playbook for building a startup into a billion-dollar company.”

– MIKI KUUSI, WOLT

