



ELEVATE LABS

# THE FOUNDER WAYFINDER

Leadership Report

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Example Leader

Example Company

Prepared September 2026

CONFIDENTIAL

## HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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**Part One — Executive summary.** The finding, what is in the way, and where to start. One page.

**Part Two — What now.** Where your attention belongs, what the next stage asks of you, and three things to try.

**Part Three — Detailed results.** The evidence, waypoint by waypoint. Where the debrief conversation will live.

## PART ONE – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### What you asked for

You said traction was starting and it had been a real challenge, and that you thought you were doing something to sabotage yourself.

### The headline

You think the problem is how you talk about the company. Your reviewers don't see one, by the widest margin in this dataset, and it runs against you.

Which leaves the real question. **Why isn't the sales motion working?** Asked where your attention should go, three reviewers said sales, marketing, demand generation. Two said something else: differentiate the product, build product management.

A repeatable demand engine needs something repeatably sellable. You have not failed to finish yours. It hasn't worked yet. Those are different problems and you have been solving the first one. You named the reason yourself, asked what stands in the company's way: *not sticking too hard to my favorite things*.

### What's in the way

**One: you are trying to sell the thing you most want to make.** Starting new work before completing the last ranks second for you and second for your reviewers. But the version of that in your data is not abandonment. You named persistence as the thing you are proudest of, and a reviewer independently confirmed you already do the strategy, trial and error, and networking the work takes. What you have been repeating is the attempt, at roughly the same difficulty each time. Nothing in the portfolio has been chosen for how easily it sells.

**Two: you move faster than the people around you can follow.** This is everyone's first-ranked item, yours included. It shows up in the one place your self-rating runs high rather than low: you rate yourself at the top on making sure everyone's voices are heard, and your reviewers rate you well below that. What people asked of you is small and consistent. A few scheduled touchpoints, faster replies, more concision. All three ask for predictable access rather than access once something is urgent.

**Three: you are doing all of the recovery alone.** You answered *sometimes* when asked whether you can hold this pace for two more years, while every other pace answer was at the top of the scale. What is wearing on you is a long run without an unqualified win, absorbed by one person. Tempo has nothing to do with it. *Does it all themselves* ranks third for you and your reviewers.

### Where to start

Narrow. Of the three it is the only one that directly produces what you said you need, and it makes the other two cheaper. Fewer things in motion is fewer handoffs to get right, and small proven wins are a different thing to recover from than near misses.

## PART TWO – WHAT NOW

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### THE FOUNDER YOU WANT TO BE

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**The founder you want to be.** You named creative, positive, and loving as the three words you want to be known for. Mean, stupid, and fake as the three you never want attached to you. Read together, that is a person who wants to be known for what she generates and for how she treats people, and who is more afraid of being hollow than of being wrong.

**How others see you.** Creative came back from four of six reviewers, more than any other word by a wide margin, and the words clustered around it are all in the same family: strategic, innovative, entrepreneurial, ambitious, ideas. The second cluster is energy: passionate, energetic, fast, enthusiasm. The third is warmth and usefulness: friendly, helpful, collaborative. The first word on your list came back as the dominant word on theirs. The second came back as a register rather than a word. People describe your energy more than your positivity, which are adjacent but not identical.

**What you are not.** The words people would never associate with you sort into two groups. The first is the group you were hoping for: mean, unkind, selfish, dishonest, arrogant, bigoted. Your fear of being seen as mean or fake is not being realized in any part of this data. The second group is about speed and motion: slow appeared three times, alongside static, stagnant, and lazy. Nobody who knows you thinks you are standing still.

Two words in that second group deserve attention because they are not synonyms for the others. One reviewer said they would never associate you with governance. Another said structured. Those are not judgments about your energy. They are observations about the shape of how you work, and they line up with what the rest of this report finds.

**Where the gap is.** On who you want to be and who people see, the data is unusually aligned. You want to be known for creativity and you are. You fear being seen as mean and you are not. The gap sits somewhere else, between what you believe you are bad at and what anyone else observes. There is a real version of the communication issue in here, and it is worth separating from the version you carry. One person who has worked with you asked for more concision. That is a bounded request about length, and a smaller thing than being unable to make complex ideas simple. Your own answer treats them as one problem. Only one of them shows up in anyone else's data.

**Reflection.** If you accepted, for one quarter, that you explain things well, what would you stop spending effort on, and where would that effort go instead?

## WHERE YOUR ATTENTION BELONGS

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You said it plainly: nail the value proposition and the sales mechanism, build a repeatable demand engine, and get to the point where you can hand sales to someone who leads it. You also named what you want to keep and what you want to give away first. Keep: ideating, some building, some client relationships. Hand off: the mechanics of sales and marketing.

Your reviewers were asked the same question independently. Three named sales, marketing, or demand generation. Two named product: differentiating the product, and building in-house product management. One named scaling your capability for developing other people, which that reviewer described as a real gift currently fitted in around everything else rather than given room.

The three who said sales agree with you, and that agreement is worth less than it looks. Reviewers converging on how you show up is evidence, because they have watched you. Reviewers converging on what your company should do is opinion, and most of them have less information about your pipeline than you do. Two of them told you to hire a sales or marketing specialist now, which is advice that assumes the offer is already proven. Yours is not, and you know it, which is why you have not made the hire.

The two who said product are the more interesting answers, because they question the frame rather than the sequence. If the offer is not differentiated, no amount of sales mechanism produces repeatability. That does not make them right. It makes them the only reviewers in the pool asking whether this is a sales problem at all.

Where that leaves you is narrower than where you started. Not build the engine, and not hire someone to run it, but choose what the engine is for. The shortest path to a repeatable motion runs through the offer that already sells fastest, whether or not it is the work you want to be known for.

**Reflection.** Of everything you sell, which one has had the shortest path from first conversation to signed? What would change if the engine were built for that one?

## WHAT SCALE WILL REQUIRE

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You told us what you want to keep and what you want to give away. Keep: ideating, some building, some client relationships. Hand off first: the mechanics of sales and marketing. That is a clear answer, and it matches what your reviewers think deserves your attention, which is not always the case.

Four capabilities matter now and get more expensive to do badly as a company grows.

**Decisiveness** is a strength with one qualification. Reviewers place you solidly on making timely decisions under uncertainty, and *hesitates too long before deciding* sits near the bottom of both rankings. The qualification is that the opposite failure mode is your top-ranked one. The common failure at scale is deciding too slowly; yours runs the other way, which is a better problem and still a real one. What changes with size is volume: you would need to decide fewer things and route more of them.

**Empowerment** is the most encouraging and least tested. Reviewers rate you well on giving decision-making power to people close to the work, and describe you creating opportunities for others to lead. But you have very few people to empower, and *does it all themselves* is third on both rankings. The instinct is there. The habit has not been forced.

**Talent selection** is the honest gap in this assessment. Reviewers place you around the middle on hiring well and making tough calls, without enough data behind it to say much. You have not had to make many of these decisions, and the one hard call you named you are still holding. Selection and de-selection is a technical skill that fails independently of being good with people; a founder can be excellent with people and poor at choosing them. This report cannot tell you which you are. Carry that as an open question rather than an assumed strength.

**Communicating through layers** is the one to watch, and where this report's central finding lands. At your size you align people directly. Once there is a layer between you and the work, alignment travels through other people, which is precisely what your first-ranked failure mode makes hard. The underlying capability is sound; reviewers say you explain things clearly and say why. The mechanism is what needs building: writing things down before they are needed, repeating past the point where it feels excessive, checking what actually landed.

Sorting the rest. What still serves you is the creative and strategic capability everyone named, and the openness that makes people bring you things. What you would eventually hand off is personal execution, being the one who does the hard thing herself, currently a defining strength and eventually the constraint. What is untested is talent selection and managing through a layer. What gets more expensive is the top of your forced rank: running many things at once already costs you now, and every additional person multiplies that cost.

**Reflection.** Which of the four above would you least want to be assessed on in two years, and what would you have to start doing now to change that answer?

## DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation 1: Build the engine for the thing that already sells fastest

*Competency: Aligns time, people, and resources*

*Tools: Prioritization · Effective Decision Making · Overcoming Fear / What's the Worst That Would Happen*

A repeatable demand engine needs something repeatably sellable, and nothing in your portfolio appears to have been chosen for how easily it sells. You named the mechanism yourself when asked what stands in the company's way: not sticking too hard to my favorite things. The pattern your reviewers rank second is you making the same-sized attempt repeatedly, not losing interest partway; you are persistent and they say so. Narrowing changes the size of the attempt. The decision you are carrying about stopping a piece of work is where that starts, and the reason it has been hard is a staffing reason rather than a demand one, which makes it a different decision than it feels like.

**90-day experiment:** Rank your offers by actual elapsed time from first conversation to signed, using deals you have really closed rather than estimates. Take the shortest one. Build the demand engine for that one only, and decline anything that does not serve it, writing down each thing you decline.

**Build toward:** A motion proven to repeat, which is the only condition under which the sales hire you want can succeed.

- Rank the offers by real time-to-signed, from closed deals.
- Pick the shortest, even if it is not the work you most want to be known for.
- Test the decision you are carrying against demand, not against staffing.
- Keep the list of what you declined, so you can see at the end what saying no cost.

### Action planning

| What I will try | By when | How I will know it is working |
|-----------------|---------|-------------------------------|
|                 |         |                               |
|                 |         |                               |
|                 |         |                               |

## Recommendation 2: Make yourself predictable, not slower

*Competency: Builds alignment around strategic decisions*

*Tools: Influence · Making Sense of Ambiguity · Intention Mapping*

Moving too quickly without alignment is the first-ranked failure mode for you and for every reviewer who ranked. It shows up in the one item where you rate yourself higher than others rate you: you believe voices are being heard more fully than the people around you experience. The requests were small and they all asked for the same thing: a few short scheduled touchpoints so someone can reach you before something is urgent, replies inside a day, more concision where possible. Nobody asked you to think more slowly. The speed people want you to modulate in the handoff is the same speed they name as the reason to work with you, so the experiment is about making your pace legible rather than reducing it.

**90-day experiment:** Put one short recurring touchpoint on the calendar with each person who depends on your direction, and hold it even when nothing is urgent. Separately, after any decision that affects someone else's work, write two or three sentences on what was decided and why, and send it. Then ask one person, once a month, what landed and what did not.

**Build toward:** Alignment that travels through other people rather than requiring you in the room. This is the capability that determines whether you can lead through a layer.

- Schedule the touchpoints before the next quarter starts.
- Write decisions down at the moment they are made, not later.
- Ask what landed rather than whether people agreed.
- Notice which decisions needed the write-up and which did not.

### Action planning

| What I will try | By when | How I will know it is working |
|-----------------|---------|-------------------------------|
|                 |         |                               |
|                 |         |                               |
|                 |         |                               |

### Recommendation 3: Put someone else on the recovery

*Competency: Builds a deliberate support structure*

*Tools: Coalition Building · Understanding Strengths · Emotional Agility*

Your pace answers are strong and one is not. You take real breaks, you talk to someone about how you are doing, and then you answered *sometimes* on whether you can hold this for two more years.

So tempo is not the strain. What is wearing is a long run without an unqualified win, carried by one person. In a company with more people some of that is distributed: someone notices, a team carries part of the loss. You have no equivalent, and *does it all themselves* ranks third for you and third for your reviewers. Two of them, asked what would help most, said grow your confidence and ask for help where you are weaker. Read as feedback about you, that is not very usable. Read as an observation about your arrangements, it is: the people around you can see that you are carrying this alone.

**90-day experiment:** Name one person whose job is to notice when it is going badly, and tell them that is the job. Not a peer catch-up, and not a session you book once you are already low. Someone with standing permission to ask, and a set time to ask it. Separately, once a month, write down the one thing that worked. In a stretch with few outright wins, the record of partial ones is the only evidence available.

**Build toward:** An operating model with redundancy in it, so the company's momentum does not rest entirely on your reserves.

- Name the person and ask them directly.
- Put it on a schedule, so it does not require you to be low to trigger it.
- Keep the monthly record of what worked, however partial.
- Watch whether you are taking smaller bets than you were a year ago.

#### Action planning

| What I will try | By when | How I will know it is working |
|-----------------|---------|-------------------------------|
|                 |         |                               |
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|                 |         |                               |

## WHAT NEXT?

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You came into this asking what you were doing to sabotage yourself. That word does not fit what the data shows. Sabotage implies working against yourself in the dark. You have been working very hard, in full view of the pattern, on a version of the problem that turns out to be the wrong one. That is a different situation, and a more fixable one.

None of what this report names is a character problem, and none of it is new to you. You ranked your own failure modes in the same order your reviewers did, before seeing any of this. That is what makes the next part tractable: the work is narrowing what you already see clearly, rather than learning to see it. One offer instead of several. A pace your people can follow. Someone other than you watching the fuel.

You said you want to be known as creative, positive, and loving. The first is the word your reviewers reached for more than any other. The second shows up as the energy people describe around you. The third is harder to see in a survey, though the absence of mean, selfish, and unkind from anyone's list says something about the ground you are standing on. What none of them tells you is whether the company works. That has never been the same question, which may be worth remembering in a year that has held few unqualified wins.

Three questions to sit with before the debrief:

1. Of everything you sell, which has had the shortest path from first conversation to signed? What has kept it from being the thing you build around?
2. If the next thing you tried did not have to be the work you are proudest of, what would you try?
3. Who is responsible for putting energy back into you? If the answer is only you, what would it take to change that this year rather than after the next stage?

## PART THREE – DETAILED RESULTS

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The framework and approach to the questions and evaluation are drawn from *Uncharted Leadership: Navigating Disruption Without a Map* by Katie Sheketoff.

### AWARENESS

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*Awareness is the way we perceive, interpret, and engage with life — knowing what's going on inside us and around us. In leadership, it starts with a deceptively simple question: Who am I at this moment in time? Leaders with strong awareness don't just know themselves in the abstract — they track how their internal state is affecting the people and decisions around them.*

Awareness is your strongest waypoint in one specific respect and your most misread in another. Reviewers rate your ability to read the external environment (trends, opportunities, threats outside the team) near the top of everything measured here. That matches what you said about yourself, and it matches the word cluster: strategic, sees the ideas, connects things. On delivering hard messages and on tracking your effect on people, reviewers place you solidly, and above where you place yourself.

The gaps here run in both directions, and the split is the interesting part. On three items you rate yourself materially lower than your reviewers do, all of them about communication and impact: explaining ideas clearly, delivering tough messages, noticing how your words land. On one you rate yourself materially higher, and it is the item about feedback. You place yourself at the top on asking for feedback and changing your behavior in response. Your reviewers place you well below that.

Those two facts sit oddly together until you put them in sequence. You ask for input, which everyone confirms; you are described as proactively soliciting ideas and staying open to unconventional ones. What the data does not show is the input changing the picture you hold of yourself. The reads available to you have been consistent for some time, and the belief about your own clarity has not moved with them. Reviewers also place *has the skill but not yet the confidence* mid-pack rather than high, which is to say the skill is not in question for them.

That is the Awareness finding, and it is narrower than a general self-criticism problem. Your read of the outside world is sharp and your reviewers say so. Your read of yourself has not been updated by the input you keep asking for. The recommendations treat that as something to test rather than something to accept, because a belief that has held through this much contradicting input will not be argued away.

**Reflection.** When was the last time you changed your mind about something you believed about yourself? What made it possible then?

## ALLIANCE

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*Alliance is the way we build community and bring together diverse groups for collective action. For leaders, alliance isn't just about being well-liked — it's about creating conditions where people can do their best work. Alliance is how leadership scales.*

For a founder at your stage, alliance runs in two directions and this data speaks to both. Inside the company it is a small number of people. Outside it is a coalition of peer founders, advisors, and early clients, and that coalition is substantial. Reviewers describe you creating room for other people to experiment, lead, and excel; listening and offering to help and making connections; proactively asking for input and staying open to unconventional approaches. Giving clear, actionable feedback rates highest of anything in this domain. What people describe consistently is a founder whose instinct is to open things up.

The gap is what happens between opening it up and moving. *Moves too quickly without alignment* is the first-ranked failure mode for you and for your reviewers, and its fingerprints are in the item data. This is the one place your self-rating runs high rather than low: you place yourself at the top on making sure everyone's voices are heard, and your reviewers place you well below that. Both can be true. You do open the conversation. The question is whether the pace afterward leaves people able to keep up with what was decided and why. Conflict is the other soft spot. Addressing it head-on rates lowest of anything in this report, and it sits further below reviewers' own baselines than any other item, meaning it stood out to them relative to everything else they said.

The asks people made are the most useful thing in this section, because they are small and they point the same way. A few more scheduled touchpoints, even short ones, so someone can get your perspective before something becomes urgent. Replies inside a day. More concision where the situation allows. None of those asks you to change how you think or slow down your ideas. Each asks for predictable access. That is solvable, and solving it does not require you to become a different kind of founder, which matters: the speed people want you to modulate in the handoff is the same speed they name as the reason to work with you.

**Reflection.** When you have moved on something quickly and it went badly, what was actually missing: the decision, or everyone else's ability to see how you got there?

## ACTION

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*Action is movement and momentum. It's experimentation, testing, learning, and trying again — moving forward even without a clear destination. The hardest part of action in leadership isn't the doing — it's bringing others with you while you do it.*

Action is your highest-rated domain, and the item that rates highest across the entire report is inspiring people to keep moving during change and disruption. Reviewers place you strongly on taking responsibility when things go wrong, stepping into problems you did not create, trying new approaches instead of defaulting to what has always been done, and giving decision-making power to people close to the work. You named persistence yourself, doing something hard when there is not much momentum, and said that you do not only want to generate ideas, you want to see them come to fruition. The data supports the first half of that unambiguously.

The second half is where the mechanism shows up. *Starts new things before finishing the last one* is second-ranked by you and by your reviewers, with two reviewers putting it at the very top of their list. *Struggles to prioritize competing demands* is fourth for both. The item data rules out the obvious explanations: you make timely decisions, you act on what matters, and you named persistence through low momentum as the thing you are proudest of. So the pattern people are seeing is you trying again, rather than you losing interest.

What the data does not show is anything getting easier between attempts. Each one appears to start from roughly the same place, at roughly the same difficulty. That is what separates persistence from progress, and it is the specific thing narrowing would change.

You have already identified where narrowing would start. In your self-review you named a piece of work you believe the company should stop, said stopping it is the right call at least for now, and named what makes it hard: the cost falls on specific people, and continuing is how their work is currently justified. You also noted that one part of that has since resolved. The tradeoff you have been weighing may no longer have the shape it had when you started carrying it, and that is worth checking before another quarter passes.

**Reflection.** Of everything currently open, which one would you be relieved to close, and what would you have to be willing to lose to close it?

## ENDURANCE

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*Endurance is the fuel supply for a voyage measured in years: what you spend, and what comes back in. Pace answers how fast the tank empties. Recovery answers whether anything is filling it.*

**What you spend.** On pace, this data is good and unusual. You rate yourself at the top on taking real breaks that actually happen, and your reviewers place you well too, if not quite as high. You rate yourself at the top on talking openly with someone about how you are doing rather than only about how the business is doing, and here your reviewers agree almost completely. This is one of the highest-rated items in the report. Many founders manage pace badly and cannot say either of those things. You have deliberately avoided the sprint, and the data shows it.

**What comes back in.** Two responses complicate that picture, and both are yours alone; no reviewer was asked either question. Asked whether you have the people around you that you need for advice, support, and guidance, you answered close to the top but not at it. Asked whether you can hold this current pace for two more years, you answered *sometimes*. That is the most consequential single answer in your self-review, and it sits alongside pace answers that look strong.

The two are not in conflict. The wear is coming from somewhere other than tempo: from a long run without unqualified wins, and from getting up off the mat each time without anyone else doing that lifting for you. In a larger company some of that work is distributed. A manager notices, a team shares the loss, an institution absorbs part of the failure. You are absorbing all of it while being the person everyone else looks to for momentum. Two reviewers, asked what would most help, said grow your confidence as a founder and ask for help where you are actually weaker. Those read as feedback about self-belief. They are also observations about load.

**Read together.** A strong pace result does not offset a thin replenishment one, and this report will not let it. You have built a spend rate you can sustain. The resupply has not been built, and *does it all themselves* sitting third on both rankings is the same finding arriving from a different direction. The open question for the next two years is whether anything is designed to put energy back in, or whether that has been left to take care of itself. That you can keep going you have already shown.

**Reflection.** Who currently notices when it is going badly, without you having to tell them? If the answer is nobody, is that a choice you have made or one that happened?

## CONTINUING THE WORK

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*This Founder Wayfinder represents a moment in time. The success of this comes from what comes next: what you choose to act on, and how you choose to take the work forward. Below are resources and opportunities for you to continue to explore.*

### What this report could not see

This report rests on six usable reviewer responses, two of which came from people who have worked inside the company. That mix is normal for a founder, and it means the data is strong on how you show up and how you think, and thinner on how your leadership lands on the people you employ.

A Wayfinder for your team measures that directly. It is the one gap this report names about itself.

### The capabilities this report could not assess

A 360 measures what you currently do. It cannot assess a capability you have not yet had occasion to use. Part Two named two of those honestly rather than guessing: whether you select and de-select talent well, and whether you can hold alignment through a layer of management. Neither has been exercised at your current size.

### Where the framework comes from

*Uncharted Leadership: Navigating Disruption Without a Map — the book behind the three waypoints, by Katie Sheketoff.*

For more resources, check out [uncharted.elevatelabs.biz](http://uncharted.elevatelabs.biz) — writing and tools for founders and early-stage teams.

To talk about any of it

[Find a time on Katie's calendar](#)