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STARTUP SPARK

YOUR FORTNIGHTLY GUIDE TO INDIA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL NEWS

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THE REALITY MOST FOUNDERS DON'T SEE

Picture this.

A founder spends months building a product. Late nights, endless iterations, refining features, polishing UI, perfecting flows. The product finally launches. There's excitement, anticipation, maybe even a small announcement on LinkedIn.

And then... nothing happens.

No traction. No real users. No meaningful feedback.

Not because the founder didn't work hard, but because they worked in the wrong direction.

This is the reality most early-stage founders face, and it aligns with one of the most powerful insights highlighted right at the beginning of the lessons document: most founders don't actually know their audience.

And that's where everything begins to break.

Startups don't fail because of a lack of effort. They fail because of misalignment. Founders assume they understand the user, but rarely spend enough time validating that understanding. They build for an imagined persona, not a real person with real pain.

Another uncomfortable truth emerges early in the lessons — your idea, by itself, has almost no value.

Ideas feel powerful inside your head. But the market doesn't reward ideas. It rewards execution, timing, and relevance. Until someone is willing to pay for your solution in money, time, or attention, your idea is just a hypothesis.

And yet, founders spend disproportionate time obsessing over the idea rather than the problem.

The biggest shift a founder can make is simple but difficult: stop asking "Is this a great idea?" and start asking "Does this solve a real, painful problem for someone specific?"

Because that shift determines everything that follows.



THE EXECUTION TRAP

One of the most common traps founders fall into is overbuilding before testing. The document makes this brutally clear – building for months before testing is not dedication, it’s a mistake.

There’s a tendency to believe that more features, more polish, and more preparation will increase the chances of success. In reality, it does the opposite. The longer you build in isolation, the further you drift from reality.

Startups are not built in isolation. They are built into feedback loops.

The most effective founders operate differently. They build small, launch fast, measure honestly, and learn continuously. They don’t wait for perfection because they understand that perfection is not a prerequisite for learning – iteration is.

This connects deeply with another insight: no marketing can fix a bad product.

Many founders try to compensate for weak product-market fit with aggressive marketing. They believe growth can be engineered through tactics. But growth without retention is just noise. If users don’t find value, they won’t stay – and if they don’t stay, nothing scales.

Even worse, driving traffic to a broken product only accelerates failure.

This is why timing matters. Growth is not something you pursue immediately. It is something you earn after you’ve built something people genuinely want. Another critical lesson lies in focus. Founders often try to do too much, too early. Multiple features, multiple segments, multiple directions. But clarity wins over complexity. The strongest startups begin by solving one problem extremely well, building depth before expanding breadth.

Execution is not about doing more. It’s about doing the right things, in the right order.

ACTUALLY BUILDS STARTUPS

If you step back and look at all 19 lessons together, a pattern starts to emerge.

Startups are not built on intelligence alone. They are built on discipline.

Discipline in understanding users. Discipline in managing resources. Discipline in staying consistent when results are invisible.

One of the most underrated but critical insights is financial awareness. Founders often underestimate the importance of understanding cash flow, burn rate, and runway. In today’s environment, where capital is harder to access, this becomes even more important. It’s not enough to build something valuable – you need to sustain it long enough for that value to compound.

At the same time, founders need to rethink what success looks like. The document clearly warns against vanity metrics, media coverage, awards, large teams, or even big fundraising rounds as indicators of real success.

These are signals. Not outcomes. Real success is simpler, but harder:

- Are users coming back?
- Are they willing to pay?
- Is the product solving something meaningful?

Another important shift is around mindset. Starting a business does not automatically make someone a founder.

Being a founder is about continuous learning, adaptability, and resilience. It’s about evolving with every failure, every insight, every user interaction.

And in a world where automation and AI are rapidly changing how businesses operate, the question is no longer whether technology will impact your startup – it’s how you choose to use it.

The advantage will not go to those who resist change, but to those who integrate it effectively.

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THE LONG GAME

There's a narrative around startups that success happens quickly. That with the right idea, the right team, and the right timing, growth becomes inevitable.

The lessons strongly push back against this. There is no shortcut to success. The journey is long, unpredictable, and often frustrating. Progress feels slow in the beginning because most of the work is invisible - understanding users, refining the product, building systems, and making mistakes. And yet, this is where the foundation is built.

Another powerful insight is the idea of compounding effort. Founders who show up consistently, even when there are no immediate results, are the ones who eventually break through. Momentum in startups doesn't explode overnight. It compounds over time.

Clarity also plays a critical role. The document emphasises that clear communication always beats cleverness. Founders often try to sound sophisticated, especially when explaining their product. But confusion kills adoption. If users don't understand what you do and why it matters, they won't engage - no matter how innovative the solution is. And finally, one of the most grounded lessons: saying you are an "AI company" means nothing today.

Technology is no longer the differentiator. Value is. In the end, startups are not about ideas, trends, or hype. They are about solving real problems, for real people, consistently over time.

CLOSING NOTE

If there's one thing these 19 lessons collectively reinforce, it's this: Startups are not built on breakthroughs alone.

- They are built on small, repeated, disciplined actions.
- Understanding your user.
- Testing your assumptions.
- Building with intent.
- Iterating with feedback.
- And showing up - every single day.

Because in the end, the founders who win are not the ones with the best ideas. They are the ones who stay long enough to get it right. **The 19 lessons that can help you get it right:**

1. 4 out of 5 founders don't know their audience - don't be one of them.
2. Your idea isn't worth much unless someone pays for it.
3. Building for months before testing is a bad idea - build, launch, measure, learn.
4. LinkedIn is a goldmine for B2B sales - build your personal brand.
5. Know your finances (cash flow, burn rate, runway).
6. Solve a real need - many startups fail because they don't.
7. Starting a business doesn't make you a founder - keep learning and growing.
8. Automation is here - use it instead of resisting it.
9. No marketing can fix a bad product.
10. Driving traffic to a weak product is harmful - don't scale too early.
11. Choose "good enough" over perfection.
12. Focus on one product, solve one problem well, then expand.
13. Users will shape your product - adapt instead of resisting.
14. There are no shortcuts - success takes time and effort.
15. Consistency compounds - show up every day.
16. Clarity beats cleverness - don't confuse users.
17. Vanity metrics (awards, funding, media) ≠ real success.
18. Plans change - prototype and get feedback fast.
19. **Saying you're an "AI company" isn't a differentiator anymore.**

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