The Unusual Field Guide

Co-founders

Of all the decisions you'll make as a founder, few are more consequential than who you choose as your co-founder. It's not easy — emotionally, financially, or organizationally — to unwind the wrong choice. It can fracture a company and leave scars. Which means this is not a decision to rush.

01.

What Makes a Great Co-founder?

The ideal scenario is someone you've worked with before — someone you deeply respect and admire. The key is **alignment**:

- Alignment on the *problem* you're solving.
- Alignment on the *values* you'll uphold along the way.
- Alignment on what the *company* is about at its core.

Mutual respect matters just as much as trust. Respect is about recognizing and valuing each other's strengths. A co-founder isn't just a friend — they should bring complementary skills you need and admire. You should be able to "mind meld" on big decisions, but also disagree, argue, and repair.

02.

Finding the Right Match

Picking a co-founder "cold" can work, but we don't recommend it as it comes with obvious risks. Start with your networks. Lean on super-connectors — investors, mentors, colleagues who know lots of people. If you find someone promising, don't just swap résumés or have coffee.

Work on something together. The best filter is to tackle a hard project side-by-side and see if you make each other better. Give it a few months as a trial period, and check in regularly about whether you both want to keep going.

03.

Setting Expectations Early

Startups are lonely, and having the right partner in the trenches matters. But don't just "pick and go." Sit down early and often with your co-founder to align on expectations:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Equity split
- Board structure
- Desired outcomes
- Personal concerns and fears

An honest conversation now can save you years of pain later. And it's not a one-time thing — keep revisiting as the company evolves.

04.

What if You Don’t Have One?

Not every great company starts with two names on the masthead. If you don’t have the perfect co-founder yet, you have options:

- Start solo and plan to add a co-founder later.
- Wait until you find the right person.
- Decide you’d rather not do it without one.

There’s no single right answer. What matters is **bedrock conviction** in yourself and your founding team. Do you have something unique — deep domain knowledge, a special skill, or the ability to recruit and inspire top talent? Investors will hold you to that same standard. Better to be solo and strong than partnered and misaligned.