

The Unusual Field Guide

Leadership in practice (from founder to CEO)

TL;DR

- Leadership is about clarity, consistency, and courage.
- As your company grows, your job changes. At 5 people, you're building a product. At 50, you're building people.

01.

The transition

The hardest shift founders make is from doing to leading. That means:

- ☐ Communicating priorities clearly.
- ☐ Managing your energy, not just your time.
- ☐ Creating systems of accountability without killing creativity.

02.

Founder leadership principles

Prioritize relentlessly

- ☐ Use a simple framework: What drives PMF, what drives revenue, what drives morale.
- ☐ Revisit weekly.

Manage with transparency

- ☐ Share metrics and context; give trust to get trust.
- ☐ Give feedback early and often — privately, specifically, respectfully.

Build leaders, not followers

- ☐ Your job is to make yourself less essential every quarter.
- ☐ Coach others to make decisions without you.

INSIGHT: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, build leaders who can go without you.”

03.

From founder to CEO

As your company scales, your job shifts from building the product to building the people who build the product.

But as a founder or CEO, there are a hundred things you could be doing at any given moment. Hiring. Fundraising. Product reviews. Customer calls. Board prep. The noise is endless — and it never fully stops.

That means you have to ruthlessly prioritize. Build systems to separate what's urgent from what's essential. Align your teams around focus. And preserve your own attention for the few decisions that truly move the company forward.

| “As CEO, your scarcest resource isn’t capital — it’s focus.”

At Unusual, we teach a framework called the GPP Heatmap to help founders do exactly that.

04.

The GPP Heatmap: GTM + product + people

The framework is simple but powerful. Evaluate three foundational areas of your company — Go-To-Market, Product, and People — and identify where things are excellent, tolerable, or broken. Each category includes a few core metrics or qualitative indicators, the primary constraints you’re facing, and clear next steps.

INSIGHT: “Founders who can see clearly where they’re weak are already halfway to fixing it.”

05.

How to use the Heatmap

Review it weekly or biweekly with your leadership team. Use it to guide board discussions and allocate resources. If something’s “broken,” make sure the entire team knows what it is and who owns the fix.

Your heatmap becomes the company’s truth serum, forcing alignment and driving right conversations. It also helps you say no — a founder’s most underrated superpower.

06.

The GPP deep dive

1. Go-to-market

Ask yourself and your team:

- ☐ How easy is it for you to convince a smart outsider that your market opportunity is huge?
- ☐ When domain experts see your product, what strikes them as different or new?
- ☐ How much friction is there for a user to find, learn, buy, and love your product?
- ☐ How easy is it for excited users to tell their story to new prospects?
- ☐ If given a new round of capital today, could you prove within six months that your GTM motion works?

Your GTM should be the story the world tells about you when you’re not in the room

1. Product

The product is everything your customer touches, from UX to documentation to support. Ask:

- ☐ Are you building for users who know what they need, or those who don't yet realize it?
- ☐ What's the best new product you've seen recently — and what can you learn from it?
- ☐ How valuable are roadmaps for your team, and what makes one truly exceptional?
- ☐ Do you agree with Jobs' standard that "a product is either amazing or shit"? If not, what's your standard?
- ☐ How do you guarantee "truth serum" in feedback?
- ☐ Where should your balance lie between engineering precision and artistic vision?

The best founders are part scientist, part artist. They use intuition to leap and data to land.

1. People

Ask yourself:

- ☐ As operational needs grow, who owns them?
- ☐ What role do you want culture to play in your company's next phase?
- ☐ Is your interview process documented, consistent, and understood by all?
- ☐ Will you personally approve every hire or delegate thoughtfully?
- ☐ Are you moving quickly enough on people who aren't working out?
- ☐ How experienced are you at hiring outside your domain expertise?

INSIGHT: "People are not your greatest asset. The right people are."

07.

Startup CEO management checklist

- ☐ Schedule regular one-on-ones with your team.
- ☐ Use a “founder heat map” to prioritize your energy.
- ☐ Delegate outcomes, not tasks.
- ☐ Hold post-mortems, not blame sessions.
- ☐ Celebrate wins publicly; handle misses privately.

PRO TIP: Leadership is a skill, not a status. Read. Reflect. Get coaching. Ask for feedback, especially when it's hard to hear.