The Unusual Field Guide

Idea or Insight?

One of the biggest mistakes early-stage founders make is confusing an idea with an insight.

01.

Ideas are everywhere. Insights are rare.

An idea is something anyone can stumble on. It's obvious. It's consensus. It makes sense on paper. An insight, on the other hand, is something deeper — something you see that others don't. It's often born out of hard-earned experience, or from running headfirst into a problem that keeps nagging at you until you can't ignore it. Insights are, by definition, non-consensus.

That distinction matters. Why? Because successful startups aren't about chasing the obvious. Obvious ideas attract well resourced incumbents with deep pockets. Why would a startup win at that game? If everyone nods and says, "Yes, that's a great idea," you're probably too late — or you're playing a game you can't win.

02.

Great startups always begin with an insight — a non-obvious, high-conviction belief about how the world will be in the future.

That belief gives you an edge. It lets you move faster, hire better, and attract early adopters who are just as frustrated or inspired as you are.

As one founder told us: *"I couldn't let it go. It kept me up at night The world just didn't see it, and I needed to prove it."*

That's what insight feels like. It's a problem you can't stop thinking about. It's a wrong you need to right. And it's something you believe before the rest of the world catches up.

03.

Where do insights come from?

Rarely from pure logic. Einstein once said his greatest discoveries came not from reason or a logical thought process, but from intuition. The same is true for founders. Insights usually emerge from lived experience — when you've wrestled with a problem again and again and realize there has to be a better way.

At Unusual, we've always called this a leap of faith assumption: a belief about the future that most people aren't ready to make. That's part of your edge.

04.

Why now?

If you're working with a significant breakthrough in technology and you hold a non-consensus view of a solution that will be used in the future, you may have an insight.

If you're simply building something that could exist, but you can't answer "why now," "why you," and "why this is different," then you probably just have an idea.

05.

Ideas are cheap. Insights are investable.

The companies that become generational successes always start with an insight. That insight becomes the foundation for everything: product, go-to-market, culture, and strategy.

You don't have to perfectly articulate your insight on day one. But you do have to be chasing one. And you have to believe in it enough to make the leap.