

The Unusual Field Guide

Introduction to product-market fit and the Unusual Way

TL;DR

- ❑ Most startups fail because they follow the wrong process, not because they build the wrong product.
- ❑ You discover product-market fit (PMF) through disciplined learning, not brute-force execution.
- ❑ The Lean Startup method is a scientific process for increasing the odds of discovering PMF

The odds of your startup becoming successful are worse than gambling. Fewer than 1% of startups ever reach their goals, and most never return the capital invested in them.

We've spent our careers obsessed with why, and found the answer is simple: most founders don't follow a process designed for learning.

Finding product-market fit isn't about guessing right. It's about running disciplined experiments fast enough, cheap enough, and honestly enough to discover the truth and ruthlessly cut what doesn't work.

| *"Perfection is attained not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."* — Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

It's about being built to learn before you're built to scale.

The **Lean Startup framework** — pioneered by Steve Blank and Eric Ries — applies the scientific method to company building. Instead of writing a static business plan, founders form hypotheses, run experiments, and analyze data to test whether customers truly find value.

This section of the Field Guide explains how to apply that framework to an insight worth testing — with our own Unusual twist, starting with one of our ground truths: finding product-market fit starts with finding desperation. Not interest. Not curiosity. Desperation.

Desperate customers feel an unavoidable pain that demands immediate attention. They're willing to take a chance on a startup because the pain of inaction is worse than the risk of trying something new. As we often say:

| *"Only desperate people buy from startups."*

Without desperation, there's no urgency. Startups must have early adopters who are desperate for an alternative outcome.

And you can't manufacture desperation — you can only uncover it. The people trying to solve the problem and failing (often painfully so) are the ones who will help you find PMF. To find those desperate users, you will have to learn to ask the right questions and embrace the challenge of talking to a lot of prospects.