The Unusual Field Guide

Raising at the Start: Should You?

One of the first questions almost every founder asks is whether to raise money right away. The answer is: it depends. And it's deeply personal.

Here's the truth: **the more money you raise, the more responsibility and stress you put on yourself to get everything right.** At the very beginning, you actually know very little with certainty. Which means your best move is usually to raise as little as possible until you've validated your insight, found a desperate user, and built alignment with your co-founders.

This is counterintuitive. Most people want to minimize risk and load up on capital early, sometimes even before leaving their jobs. But entrepreneurship is about running toward risk. That's where the biggest outcomes come from.

So here's the framework:

- Raise only what you need to cover the basics (living expenses, research, travel, early exploration).
- Bootstrap if you can. The further you get before raising, the better your valuation will be.
- Align this decision with your personal circumstances — what you can and can't live with financially.

01.

Why Raise a Pre-seed?

There are valid reasons to raise a pre-seed round:

- **Guidance.** A strong investor can provide expertise and reduce risk as you navigate the unknown.
- **Runway.** Most pre-seed rounds fund 12 months of exploration and customer discovery with a small team (1–3 hires).
- **Milestones.** Use that time to validate your insight, build an early product, and test with real users.

Some founders skip pre-seed and go straight to seed when conviction is clear and the insight strong. That can work, but it's rare. Start with this question: *What do I need to accomplish in the next 12 months to make meaningful progress?* Fund that — no more, no less.

02.

What Investors Look For at Pre-seed

- **Team.** This is the single most important factor. Great investors know everything else will change. They want to back your skills, resilience, and unique edge. Ask yourself: what are your superpowers?
- **Market.** Investors are betting on whether your insight can become a company big enough to matter. Venture outcomes are binary — either iconic or irrelevant. The market has to be big enough to justify the risk.
- **Validation.** Any evidence that you deeply understand the problem and have spoken to potential customers helps. The more validation, the less risky you look.

03.

Choosing the Right Investor

At this stage, **who you take money from matters as much as the money itself**. You want someone who believes in you, not just the idea. Someone who's willing to give you hard truths, stand beside you when things get rough, and help you grow as a founder.

There's plenty of capital out there. Don't settle for investors who only show up once a quarter and ask about revenue. Find partners who are as committed to your success as you are.