

GUIDE

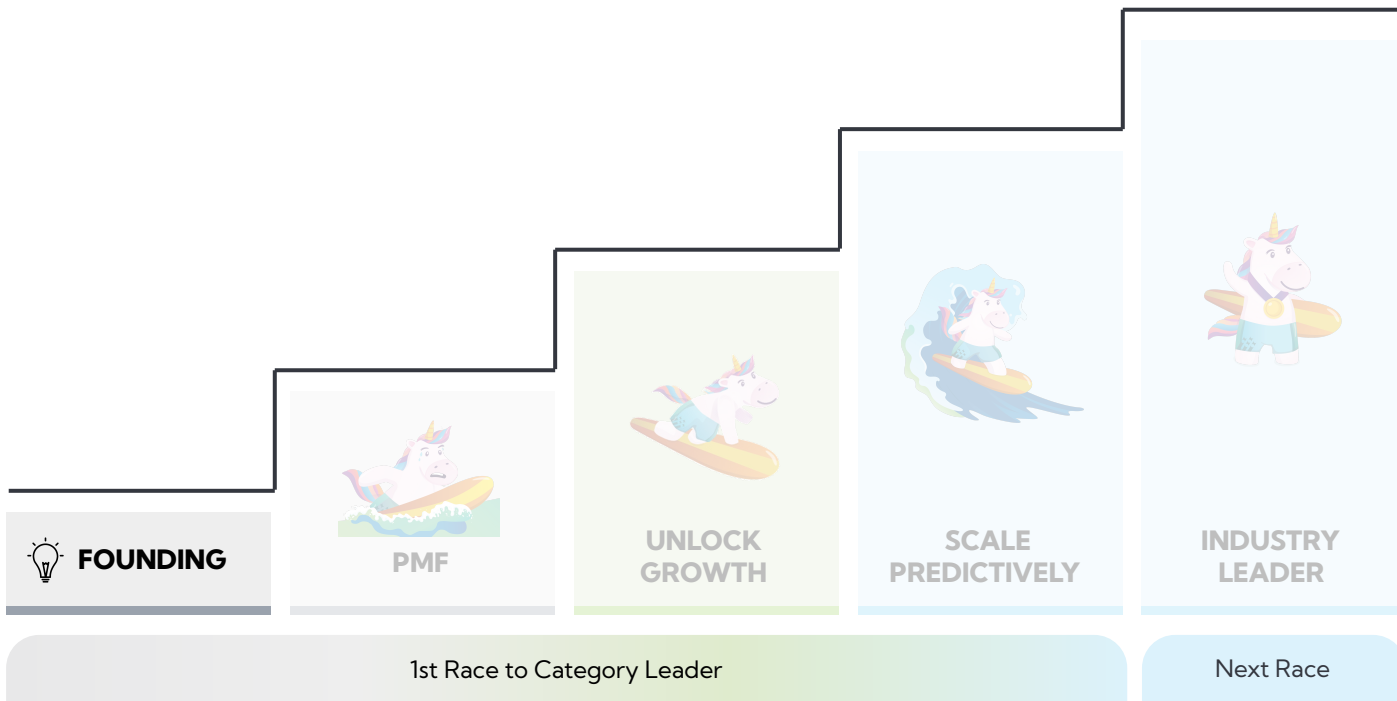
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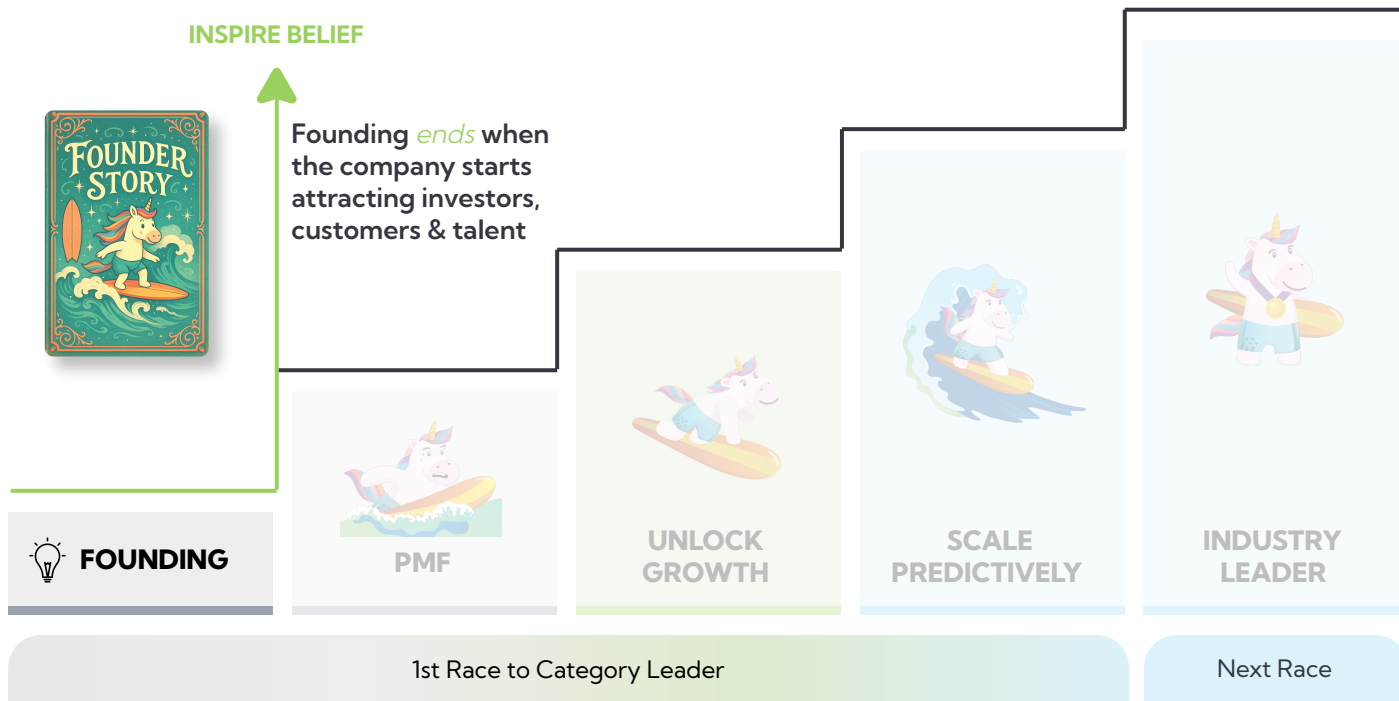


FOUNDING *the Company*

The Company Journey *starts* with **FOUNDING**



The Company Journey *starts* with **FOUNDING**



FOUNDING STORY

attracts **investors**,
customers & **talent**

//

Learning to tell a story is incredibly important because that's how the money works. The money flows as a function of a story."

Don Valentine
Sequoia founder

If you don't have a great story, it's hard to get people motivated to join you, to work on the product, and to get people to invest in the product,"

Ben Horowitz
AZ16 co-founder



Don't Sell. **Compel** with a Story.

Selling creates a transaction. Storytelling builds a relationship.

	Selling (The "What")	Effective Storytelling (The "Why?")
Focus	The Product & Its Features	The Customer & Their Problem
Method	Pushing Logic & Data	Pulling Emotion & Empathy
Primary Goal	The Transaction	The Relationship
Audience Feels	Persuaded or "Sold"	Understood & Inspired
Impact	Forgettable	Memorable & Retold

The Science of a Great Story

Stories simulate experiences. **Our brains don't just hear a story; they relive it.** Neurologically, our minds don't strongly distinguish between hearing about an event and experiencing it.



Memorable Facts are forgettable, but our brains are wired to remember experiences. A great story makes your message sticky, memorable, and easy to share.



Relatable Emotionally connect with the hero. Explains the "Why?"



Believable Because we feel the story, we internalize its message. This bypasses skepticism and creates a deep, emotional trust that makes the story feel true.



Inspiring It moves people to act: investors to commit, talent to join, and customers to buy.

GUIDE

But, I **can't** write or tell stories.

Now, there is a simple solution:

Use the LLM to apply Joseph Campbell's framework

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Use the **LLM** to write your **founding story**

1

Answer these simple questions to find the raw material for your heroic story



The Origin: **Why you?**

Why did you leave a comfortable job to start your company? What painful problem did you personally experience? What was your unique insight on how to solve it? What is your "unfair advantage" or special expertise?



The Elixir: **What is your secret?**

What major challenge (a pivot, a failure) led to your big breakthrough? What is the one product or feature that your first customers absolutely love?



The Proof: **How do we know you are right?**

What are your top 1-3 user metrics (e.g., growth, engagement)? Who are your most passionate early design partners? Which top-tier expert has validated your approach?



Win the race: **How will you win the category?**

What is your plan to get your next 100 and 1,000 customers? What is your long-term, defensible moat (e.g., network effects, data)?

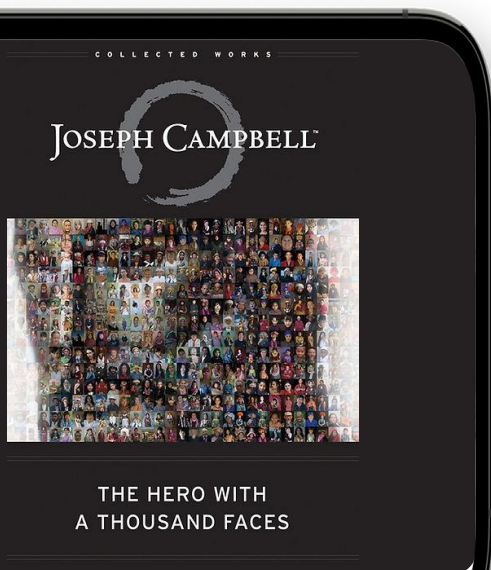


The Return: **Why does it matter?**

What is your ultimate vision for how the world will be different? How does your product make your customer a hero in their own story?

2

Then ask the LLM to apply Joseph Campbell's framework.



A proven Story format: Campbell's **Protagonist** Journey

Mythologist Joseph Campbell identified a universal pattern for thousands of stories found in myths, legends and religions across all human cultures: every great story follows the **same** journey of transformation



Your Story is a Protagonist's Journey: a 3-act play

Great founding stories inspire investors to believe in the vision, employees to believe in the mission and customers to believe in the product

ACT I: THE ORIGIN

"Why start the journey?"

You begin in a **Broken Market** (the Ordinary World) where your unique background gives you a **Key Insight** (the Call to Adventure) to read the wave.

ACT II: CATCH THE BIG WAVE

"How did you find the secret?"

You survive the **Ordeal** (pivots, failures) to discover the **Elixir**: the repeatable playbook to make your champion a hero. This is how you achieve true product-market fit and unlock growth.

ACT III: THE RETURN

"How will you change the world?"

You **Return with the Elixir** by scaling your solution to make your entire community of champions into heroes. Your success is measured by their success.

YOUR GOAL

Prove you have the right founder-market fit.

YOUR GOAL

Prove you have found the secret to unlocking growth.

YOUR GOAL

Show how you will transform the industry.

Applying **Protagonist's Journey** to create a **"Founding Story"**

Great founding stories inspire investors to believe in the vision, employees to believe in the mission and customers to believe in the product



The Origin: Why start the journey?

Founder shows an authentic connection/obsession by receiving a **call to adventure** ("i lived the problem") while living in the **ordinary world**. Also shows **founder-market fit** with professional credibility ("i have the expertise") and unique secret ("i have the key insight").



The Elixir (Catch the Big Wave): Why will you win?

Detail the **ordeal** (pivots, team changes, failures) that led to your breakthrough **elixir** – the product that achieves PMF and unlocks explosive growth.



The Proof: Traction

Validate your story with early user data (use hard numbers), desperate design partners, passionate supporting advisors, similar successes, early product progress



Win race to category leader

Outline your aggressive plan to scale, defeat competitors, and build a lasting, defensible moat. In Campbell's outline, this is the road back and resurrection.



The Return (Vision): Transform your community into heroes.

Frame your vision around your customer's success. In Campbell's outline, this is the final purpose of the journey: **return with elixir to transform the entire community**

Investor's reaction to the **Founding Story**

This story structure takes an investor from understanding the problem to believing you are the only person to solve it, and finally, to seeing the massive financial opportunity.



The Origin: Why start the journey?

Why this team is committed and will win.
Build personal connection to team.



The Elixir (Catch the Big Wave): Why will you win?

The secret sauce.



The Proof: Traction

De-risk. Founders can execute. Market validation



Win race to category leader

See path to category leader



The Return (Vision):

Transform your community into heroes.

See path to transforming whole industry

Two Founding Stories

This story structure takes an investor from understanding the problem to believing you are the only person to solve it, and finally, to seeing the massive financial opportunity.

SURFER:
FOUNDER

WAVE:
MARKET DISRUPTION

SURF THE WAVE:
COMPANY JOURNEY

:talkdesk®

Tiago Paiva
Age 24, but built a hot product

Call center in minutes
New cloud application

2011: Born from a hackathon;
Launched product
2012: Storm invested 1 yr later
2017: Became a platform
2018: Achieved unicorn status
2020: Surpassed \$100m ARR

TEKION

Jay Vijayan
Former Tesla, VMware executive

Modern car dealership software
New cloud application

2016: Founded; Storm invested
2019: Launched flagship product
2020: Closed OEM partner (GM)
Achieved unicorn status
2023: Surpassed \$100m ARR



We are signing
up customers with
zero marketing"

talkdesk



The Origin: Why start the journey?

While working as an engineer and quoted a high price for a basic call center, Tiago's key insight was to build a call center 100% in a browser to help any company deliver better customer service – no hardware required.



The Elixir (Catch the Big Wave): Why will you win?

Riding the cloud and browser waves, he built a prototype in 10 days and won the Twilio's developer contest. The win proved his key insight: a call center deployed in minutes, not months.



The Proof: Traction

With zero marketing spend, organic growth was driven by a single, killer metric: customers could set up an entire enterprise-grade call center in under five minutes.



Win race to category leader

The strategy was a bottom-up assault on the massive SMB market, using speed and simplicity as a moat against slow incumbents.



The Return (Vision): Transform your community into heroes.

The vision: rid the world of bad customer experiences by making the support agent a hero, giving every business the power to delight customers and build relationships.

//
Former Tesla exec
will take me to the
promised land"

TEKION



The Origin: Why start the journey?

As CIO of Tesla, Jay Vijayan built the industry's best customer experience software. Looking at the rest of the \$3T auto industry, he saw a broken experience for customers and dealers, who were trapped by a 40-year-old software duopoly.



The Elixir (Catch the Big Wave): Why will you win?

The timing is perfect: The cloud is finally ready, consumers began demanding a modern retail experience, and Tesla fear and envy. Tekion built the first single platform to connect OEMs, dealers, and consumers.



The Proof: Traction

He left his role as CIO of Tesla to assemble a world-class team. The initial validation was partnership discussions with top dealer groups.



Win race to category leader

The strategy is a top-down assault, partnering with market leaders first to establish credibility and create a network effect as a moat that legacy systems can't cross.

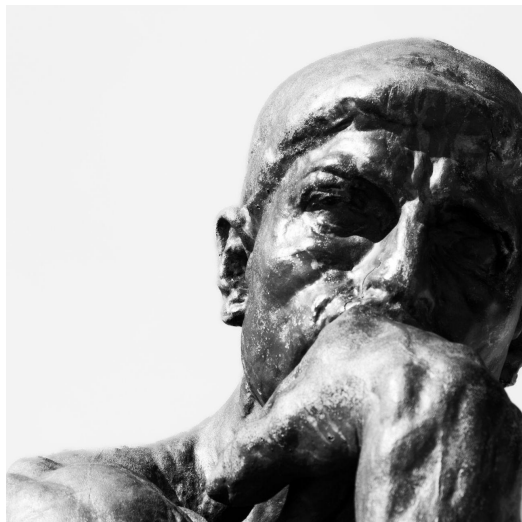


The Return (Vision): Transform your community into heroes.

The vision is to transform the industry by making the car dealer the hero. Tekion's platform gives them the modern tools they need to finally delight customers and win in the digital age.

But, investing in **Tekion** was a tough decision

TEKION



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What are the **key ingredients** of a compelling **Founding Story**?

FOUNDERS

Take me to the promised land



TRACTION

Early Validation



FOUNDING IDEA

Path to the promised land

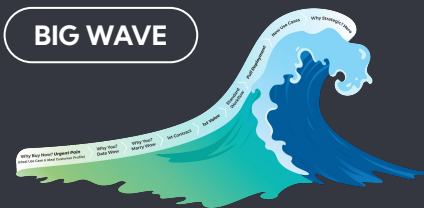


**RIGHT
COMBINATION
OF THE THREE**



What is a good Founding Idea?

The audience "sees the path to the promised land"



Massive market about to be disrupted or created

Read the wave accurately

The Stakes (so what?)



Show path to surfing unicorn

Divide path into company journey stages

The Conflict, The Vision & Promised Land (how?)

Who are great **Founders**?

The audience "believes founder will take them to the promised land"

GREAT SURFER



Inspire belief with investors,
customers and talent

Key 1: Great storyteller

Key 2: Can achieve PMF & Unlock
Growth: Great Founder Market Fit

Key 3: Avoid founder drama

SURF WAVE



Show path to surfing unicorn

Divide path into company
journey stages

The Conflict, The Vision &
Promised Land (how?)

How to improve your Founding Story? **Traction**

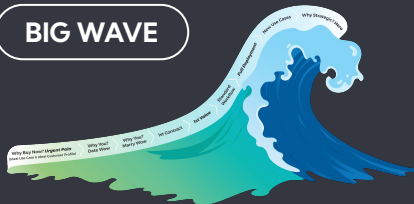
Audience likes any early validation of the Founding Story

GREAT SURFER



Passionate experts supporting
your Founding Story

BIG WAVE



Similar success

SURF WAVE



Desperate Design partners

What are the **key ingredients** of a compelling **Founding Story**?

A great story on paper is only half the battle.
The delivery is what makes it resonate.

FOUNDERS

Take me to the promised land



TRACTION

Early Validation



FOUNDING IDEA

Path to the promised land



RIGHT
COMBINATION
OF THE THREE



STORYTELLING



Key to Good **Storytelling**

Embody Authenticity

The most powerful stories are true. Don't invent drama. Speak from your genuine experience and passion. Your audience can spot a fake a mile away.

Know Your Room

Tailor the telling.

- A. Investors care about the market and your resilience.
- B. Customers care about their problem being solved.
- C. Employees care about the mission.

Show, Don't Tell

Don't say it was "hard." Say, "We had three weeks of cash left in the bank." Don't say you have "traction." Say, "We have a waitlist of 2,000 users from a single blog post."



Your Story is **Your Pitch**

It's the ultimate vehicle for conveying your passion, your resilience, and your vision.

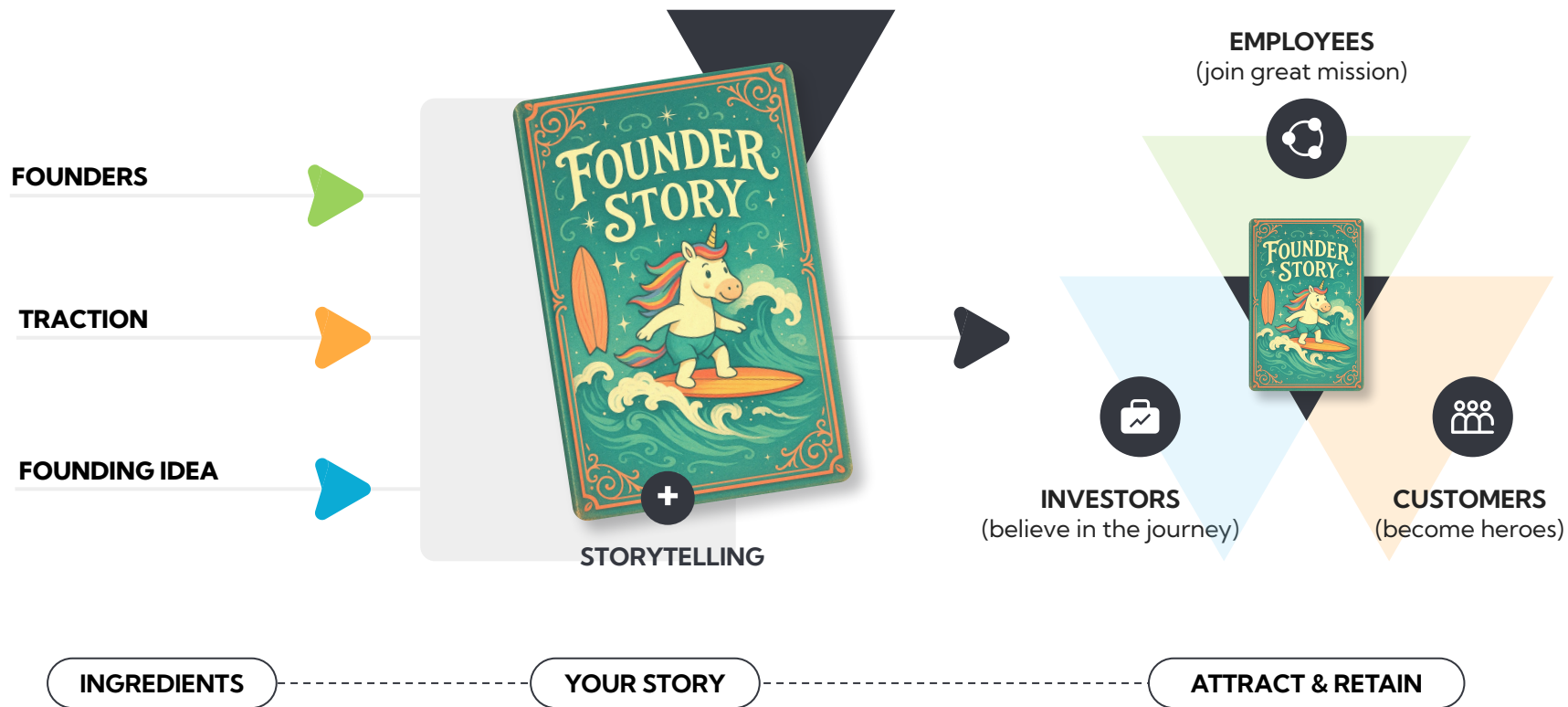
It's the data that can't be put in a spreadsheet.

Your **financial model** shows
an investor what you've done.

Your **deck** shows
them what you think.

Your **story** shows them
who you are — **and why you are
the inevitable winner.**

Your **Founding Story**



Founding Story is important even after the founding

Founding Stories are critical to attract *future* investors, talent and customers.

Founding Stories explain the “Why”

“The company story is the company strategy.

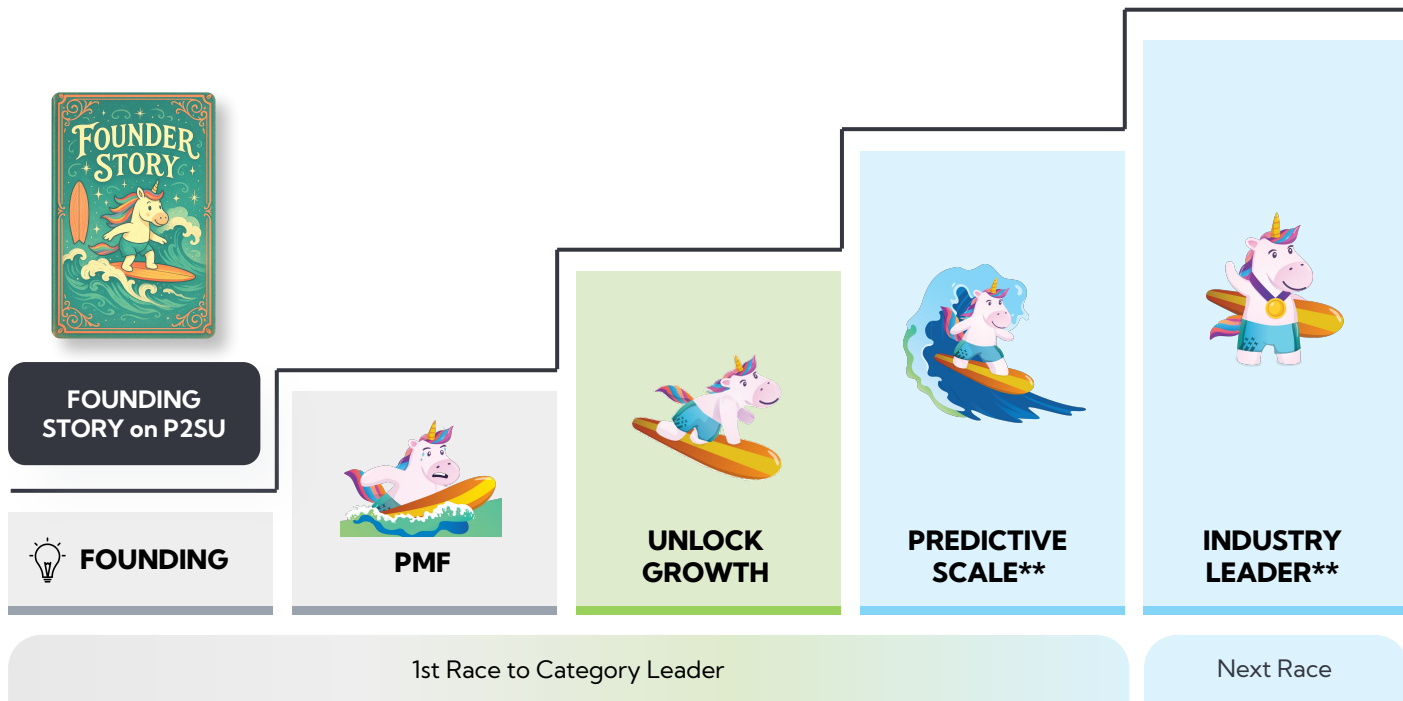
Companies that don't have a clearly articulated story don't have a clear and well thought-out strategy. The mistake people make is thinking the story is just about marketing. No, the story is the strategy. If you make your story better you make the strategy better.” Ben Horowitz

Founding Stories define the company culture.

“The CEO must be the keeper of the story. The CEO is responsible for getting the story right, that it's up to date, compelling, and can move the hearts of men and women.” Ben Horowitz



Founding stage ends with a great Founding Story



Path to Surfing Unicorn



Please feel free to contact me on
LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/tnahm](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tnahm)



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