



The Founder Mode Workbook

FOR PROSPECTIVE FOUNDERS

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Welcome to the Founder Mode Workbook, designed to help you assess whether you're ready to embrace Founder Mode — the intense, instinctual mindset founders use to stay deeply connected to their companies. If you're new to this concept, learn more in Part 1 of the blog series: [“What Is Founder Mode, Really?”](#)

Being a founder is not for the faint of heart. It requires not only a bold idea but also resilience, adaptability, leadership, and a profound commitment to the people and principles that will shape your business.

By completing this workbook, you'll:

- Understand the full scope of what it means to operate in Founder Mode.
- Gain clarity on your priorities and where you need to focus to lead effectively.
- Discover whether or not you're ready to become a founder.
- Walk away with actionable insights and next steps tailored to your unique journey.

You'll explore 14 critical facets of operating in Founder Mode, qualitatively and quantitatively assessing your preparedness.

Here's what to expect:

- **Critical questions:** Confront the realities of Founder Mode through thought-provoking prompts that encourage deep reflection on where you stand and where you want to go.
- **Qualitative self-reflection:** Jot down your responses, thoughts, and next steps in the spaces provided.
- **Quantitative self-assessment:** Use a scale of 1 to 10 to rate your level of certainty in each area. Then, average your scores across 14 categories to calculate your Overall Readiness Score, or your level of comfort with becoming a founder. We'll help you interpret your score and identify the next steps in your journey.
- **Recommended resources:** Dive into our curated list of articles, podcasts, and frameworks to help you address gaps or double down on strengths.

If you're ready, this exercise will give you greater confidence in your ability to navigate the founder's path and build something extraordinary. If you uncover gaps, consider this your road map for what to address before fully committing to the journey. If being a founder is your calling, you'll move forward with greater intention and purpose.



How to Complete This Workbook

Move through the workbook at your own pace. For each section, start by answering the questions.

Once you complete the questions for each section, you'll see a scale at the bottom of the page from 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain. This scale is intended to help you assess your level of certainty as to whether or not you have mastered each of the 14 facets of Founder Mode and are ready to build something great.

Once you have completed all 14 sections, answering the questions and ranking your level of certainty with the numerical scale for each, we'll guide you through calculating your Overall Readiness Score on page [19](#). This score is based on the scales reflecting your certainty in mastery of the 14 facets of Founder Mode.

These questions are carefully designed to allow you to pause, reflect, and understand where you're thriving and where you want to focus more time. Be honest and intentional – this process is your road map to growth and long-term success as a founder.

Let's get started.

1. The Problem

Have you identified a **problem and/or opportunity** that you would be passionate about solving for years, if not decades?

Yes No

If you answered “Yes” above, does this problem and/or opportunity exist in a **big market**?

Yes No

If you answered “Yes” above, which of the following is an estimate of the **total addressable market (TAM)**?

At least \$100 million (local) At least \$1 billion (national) At least \$3 billion (global)

Will this problem and/or opportunity still be **relevant** for decades to come?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>									

Recommended Resources

90u Library | [Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats \(SWOT\) Brief](#)

Article | Grow or Die #5: [Grow with Purpose](#)

Article | [How to Establish a Compelling Vision: A Blueprint for Founders](#)

2. Ideal Customer

Have you clearly defined your **Ideal Customer Profile** in terms of psychographics, geographics, and demographics?

Yes No

If you answered “Yes” above, do you genuinely **want to serve** your Ideal Customer over the long term?

Yes No

If you answered “Yes” above, are you confident that your product and/or service offers a **sustainable Compelling Value Proposition** – something that uniquely solves your customers’ problems and sets it apart from competitors?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

90u Library | [Ideal Customer Brief](#)

90u Library | [Compelling Value Proposition Brief](#)

Podcast | [Why Your Ideal Customer Profile Matters](#)

3. Why You?

Why do you want to start a business and grow it into a good, if not great, company?

What personal traits or patterns will help you sustain the grit required to be a successful founder?

What fuels your passion for solving this problem or seizing this opportunity?

What makes you uniquely qualified to build this business?

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain										Certain
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
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Recommended Resources

Article | [Doing Work That Matters](#)

Article | [Embracing the Hard: 11 Lessons for Success in Competition and Life](#)

Article | [The Power of Pattern Matching in Leadership](#)

4. Viable Business Model

Can you clearly see a **viable business model** where your Ideal Customers are willing to pay enough for your product and/or service to attract and retain all your Ideal Stakeholders?

Yes No

What are the **risk points** in your model?
What is your plan if the model fails?

How does your model account for your company's **long-term** financial sustainability and growth?

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

90u Library | [Customer Journey Brief](#)

90u Library | [Enterprise Value Brief](#)

Article | Grow or Die #1: [The Physics of Business](#)

5. Forever Agreements

These are the **nonnegotiable principles** that form the soul of your company:

Compelling Why: Do you have a clear and meaningful reason behind why your company should exist?

Yes No

Ideal Customer Profile: Refer to the Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) you outlined in section 2. Does this ICP align with the rest of your Forever Agreements?

Yes No

Compelling Value Proposition: Can you define the specific value you provide to your Ideal Customers?

Yes No

Ideal Team Member Profile: Have you outlined the Core Values, ambition, and competency levels required for team members to thrive in your company?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

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Recommended Resources

90u Library | [Competency, Commitment, and Capacity Brief](#)

90u Library | [Core Values Brief](#)

Article | [7 Reasons Founders Need a Compelling Why](#)

Article | [Simplify Decision-Making with Focus Filters](#)

6. Compelling and Audacious Goals

Have you set **Compelling and Audacious Goals** that will inspire both you and your future team?

Yes No

Are your goals **ambitious enough** to drive your company's growth but realistic enough to be achievable?

Yes No

If you established **Forever Agreements** — the core principles that define your company's purpose — do these goals align with them?

Yes No I haven't established Forever Agreements

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

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Recommended Resources

90u Library | [Compelling and Audacious Goals Brief](#)

Article | [Reaching the Winner's Corner: Explicit, Coherent, and Resonant](#)

Podcast | [Mapping Out Success with Goals](#)

7. Ideal Stakeholders

Have you identified at least **3–5 prospective Ideal Stakeholders** who would be willing to join your journey?

Yes No

What are the conditions under which they would:

Buy your product?

Invest in your company?

Join your team?

Partner with you?

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above?

Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

90u Library | [Ideal Stakeholders Brief](#)

Article | [The 9 Essential Characteristics of a Great Company](#)

8. Resilience and Grit

How do you respond to **setbacks or challenges**?

Are you able to push through when things get tough?

Yes No

Are you prepared for **years of hard work**, knowing that building a great company is simple in concept but incredibly difficult in execution?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

Article | [Build Better \(and Faster\) Through Failure](#)

Article | [Building Resilient and Antifragile Organizations](#)

Article | Founder Mode #6: [Mastering Founder Mode: The Core Operating System](#)

9. Adaptability

When things don't go as planned, how confident are you that you'll have the ability to **adjust** your strategy or approach?

Yes No

Have you **pivoted** a business model or adapted to changes in market conditions before?

Yes No

If so, what was the outcome? Would you have done anything differently?

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

Article | [Ambitious Leadership: Playing Bigger Requires Radical Self-Disruption](#)

Article | [Face the Facts: Changing Your Mind Is Okay](#)

Article | Founder Mode #2: [Tapping into the Founder's Mindset](#)

Article | Grow or Die #7: [Why Failure and Flow Are Essential for Growth](#)

10. Leadership and Delegation

How confident are you that you can expertly **lead a team** toward achieving your vision?

Are you comfortable **delegating key responsibilities** and empowering others to take ownership of critical tasks?

Yes No

Do you trust your ability to build a **strong leadership team** that can make decisions in your absence?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

Article | Founder Mode #8: [The Founder's Journey Through the Lens of the Stages of Development](#)

Article | Grow or Die #3: [The Art of Letting Go](#)

Article | Founder Mode #9: [The Trap of Manager Mode: Why Founders Can't \(and Shouldn't\)](#)

[Live There for Long](#)

Podcast | [The Different Modes of Leadership](#)

11. Financial Acumen

Do you fully understand what it takes to create **financial health**, including cash flow, profitability, and long-term viability?

Yes No

Are you able to spot **financial red flags** early and take action to address them?

Yes No

If you answered “Yes” above, what are some of these red flags?

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

Article | [How Visionary Leaders Leverage Data to Shape the Future](#)

Podcast | [Turn Data into Your Company’s Superpower](#)

Framework | [Prospect Theory: How People Make Decisions](#)

12. Self-Awareness

Do you have a clear understanding of your **strengths and weaknesses** as a leader?

Yes No

Are you willing to seek help or advice from others in areas where you may not excel?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

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Recommended Resources

Article | [The 9 Ways We Seek to Matter: Insights from the Enneagram](#)

Article | [The Five Entrepreneurial Archetypes](#)

Article | Founder Mode #3: [Essential Modes for Founders](#)

13. Investment Strategy

Are you clear about your ability to successfully **raise capital**?

Yes No

If you answered “Yes” above, what **approach** do you plan to take to raise capital?

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Recommended Resources

90u Library | [9 Core Competencies Brief](#)

Podcast | [Stages of Development: Stage 5](#)

14. Commit

Are you fully committed to this journey? Are you prepared to **burn the boats** — cutting off any safety nets — or at least burn the midnight oil to push the company forward?

Yes No

Do you have the **grit and perseverance** to see this through, knowing it's a long, hard road to building something great?

Yes No

Notes and reflections:

On a scale of 1–10, where 1 = uncertain and 10 = certain, how certain are you of your responses above? Check the box of the number that best fits your answers for this section.

Uncertain

Certain

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>									

Recommended Resources

Article | [15 Reasons Founders/CEOs Should Build Companies They'll Love Forever](#)

Article | Founder Mode #7: [6 Ingredients Founders Use to Build Damn Good, If Not Great, Companies](#)

Article | [On Leadership and Playing Long and Infinite Games](#)

Calculating Your Overall Readiness Score

Now, it's time to calculate your Overall Readiness Score. This number represents your confidence and commitment to walking the path of a founder. Use the following table to add together the scores for each section of this workbook and divide the total by 14 to find an average.

SECTION	SCORE
1. The Problem	
2. Ideal Customer	
3. Why You?	
4. Viable Business Model	
5. Forever Agreements	
6. Compelling and Audacious Goals	
7. Ideal Stakeholders	
8. Resilience and Grit	
9. Adaptability	
10. Leadership and Delegation	
11. Financial Acumen	
12. Self-Awareness	
13. Investment Strategy	
14. Commit	
TOTAL =	
÷ 14 =	
Overall Readiness Score =	

INTERPRETING YOUR RESULTS

SCORE 1–3: NOT READY

Though being a founder may be your dream, your responses in this workbook reveal that you don't feel ready to undertake this journey. Maybe you're stuck at the starting point, unable to take that first step and commit to the challenges ahead, or maybe you're a founder having second thoughts about the path you've chosen. Take a step toward clarity by diving into our recommended resources for the sections you scored lowest on.

SCORE 4–6: UNCERTAIN

The founder's journey has some pull on you, but you haven't fully accepted the call. Maybe you fell into business-building by accident, but you're not sure if you can do this long term. Or maybe you're a prospective founder and don't yet know what you don't know. The good news is that you don't have to reinvent the wheel or go it alone: Ninety is here to help. Our [90u Library](#) contains the concepts, tools, and disciplines needed to build, run, and scale a company.

SCORE 7–10: READY

You're either already a confident founder building something great or a prospective founder confident you're ready to begin that journey. Fuel that upward momentum by subscribing to our [Founder's Framework newsletter](#), where we discuss the latest insights, tools, and resources required for building a company you'll love forever.

While every founder's journey is unique, each is filled with challenges that push you to grow and opportunities that fuel your passion for building a great company. Our final question for you is very simple, but it's not always easy to answer.

What is the next step in your journey?

We hope the Founder Mode Series and this associated workbook have given you the clarity, tools, and confidence to face the challenges ahead and chart your path forward. Return to this workbook each year to reflect on your journey and take the next step toward becoming a good, if not great, founder.

At Ninety, we're dedicated to helping founders build companies they'll love forever. While our Founder Mode Series has come to an end, we'll continue exploring Founder Mode and the various other modes we experience as founders in our Founder's Framework articles. [Subscribe](#) to stay connected and receive the latest insights, tools, and resources to guide you on your journey.



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