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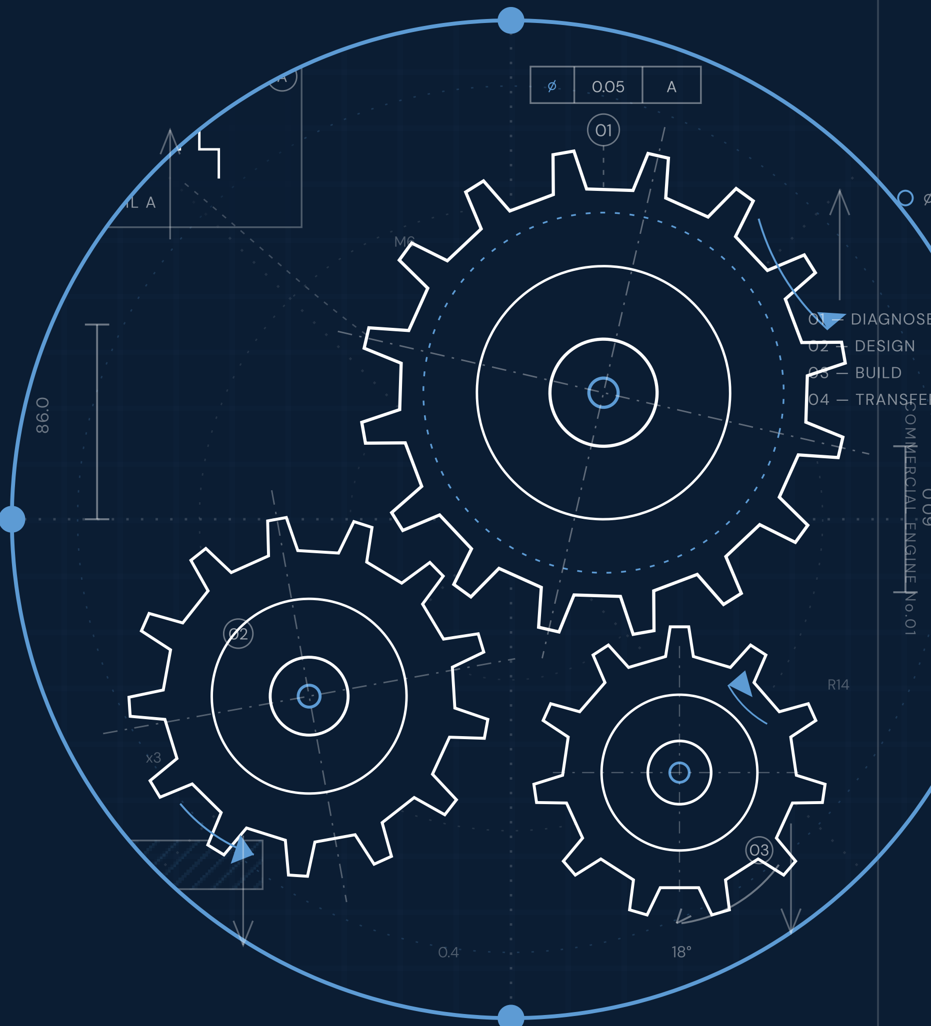
Commercial by Design

A practical playbook for building repeatable commercial systems.

D²BT

- Diagnose
- Design
- Build
- Transfer



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A PRACTICAL PLAYBOOK
FOR SCALABLE GROWTH
57 pages

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What this playbook covers

OPENING

The Commercial Side of the Company

Most companies build their product with discipline and their commercial side by improvisation. The product has a roadmap, a hypothesis behind every feature, a version history, and a habit of testing before it ships. The commercial side has a target, a headcount plan, and a forecast. One half of the company runs on evidence and iteration; the other runs on pressure and assumption, and the same leaders preside over both. They would never scale a feature nobody validated. Then they scale a revenue organization on a motion nobody validated, and when it stalls they blame the sellers, the market, or the quarter. We demand evidence from product. Too often, we accept assumptions from commercial.

That asymmetry is a design problem, not a talent problem, and it has one root cause. The knowledge of how the company actually wins lives inside a person instead of a system: who really buys and why, what opens a budget, what makes a deal move, stall, or die. Early on that knowledge sits with the founder, who found it by selling on instinct. Later it can sit with a first salesperson, a head of sales, a head of product, a regional leader, or an operator brought in to fix the problem. The location changes; the condition does not. Critical commercial knowledge trapped in a person quietly caps a company, and it does not care whose head it lives in. A company can hire around most gaps. It cannot hire around this one, because new people do not arrive with the knowledge; they arrive needing it, and there is nothing to hand them but one person’s time and memory.

The condition hides behind success. A company closes real deals and reads that as proof the commercial side works. Early revenue proves that someone in the building can sell. It does not prove the company can. Those first deals usually came from the founder, or the two or three people who started it, on relationships and conviction no one else can reproduce yet. That is worth a great deal, and it is still not a system. It is a person carrying every deal so well the results look like a machine. The better that person is, the longer the company can mistake their effort for a system. Traction is not an engine. Whether the company can sell without that person is a different question, and it is the only one that predicts what happens next.

I know the condition from the inside. For twenty-five years I was brought in after a founder had gotten something to work but could not make it repeat. I took the download, pulled out what they knew but had never written down, and built the system other people could run.

The answer is to build the commercial side with the discipline the product already gets: establish what is true, design from it, test in the market, and move the results out of any one person's hands. D²BT did not begin as a named framework. It emerged from decades of solving the same class of commercial problem. The work came first; the language came later. It runs as three movements carried by four disciplines: first you think, in Diagnose and Design; then you learn in the market, in Build; then you institutionalize, in Transfer. The disciplines begin in that order, and the order is not arbitrary, because each rests on the one before it. Which is why the work starts where every honest commercial system has to start. Not with a plan. With what is actually true.

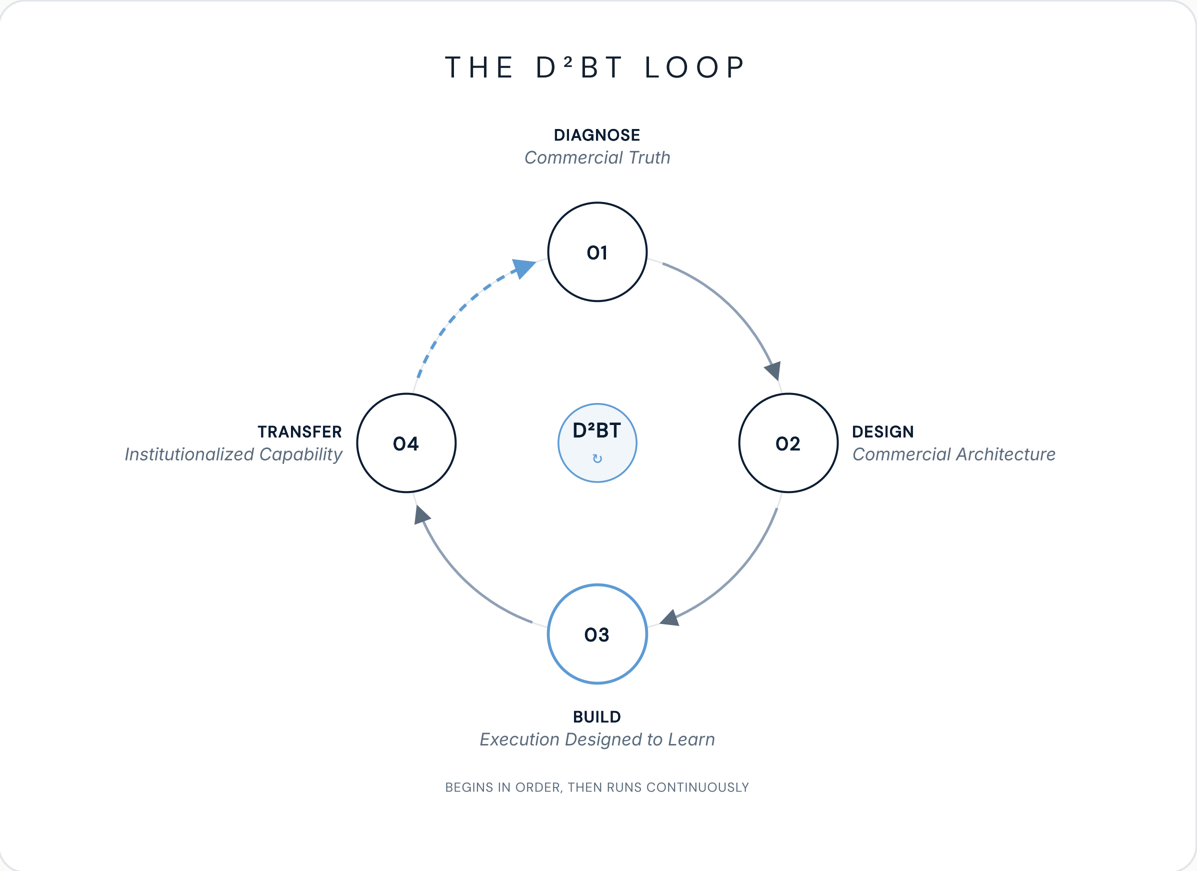

FIGURE 1 · THE DISCIPLINES BEGIN IN ORDER, THEN RUN AS A CONTINUOUS LOOP

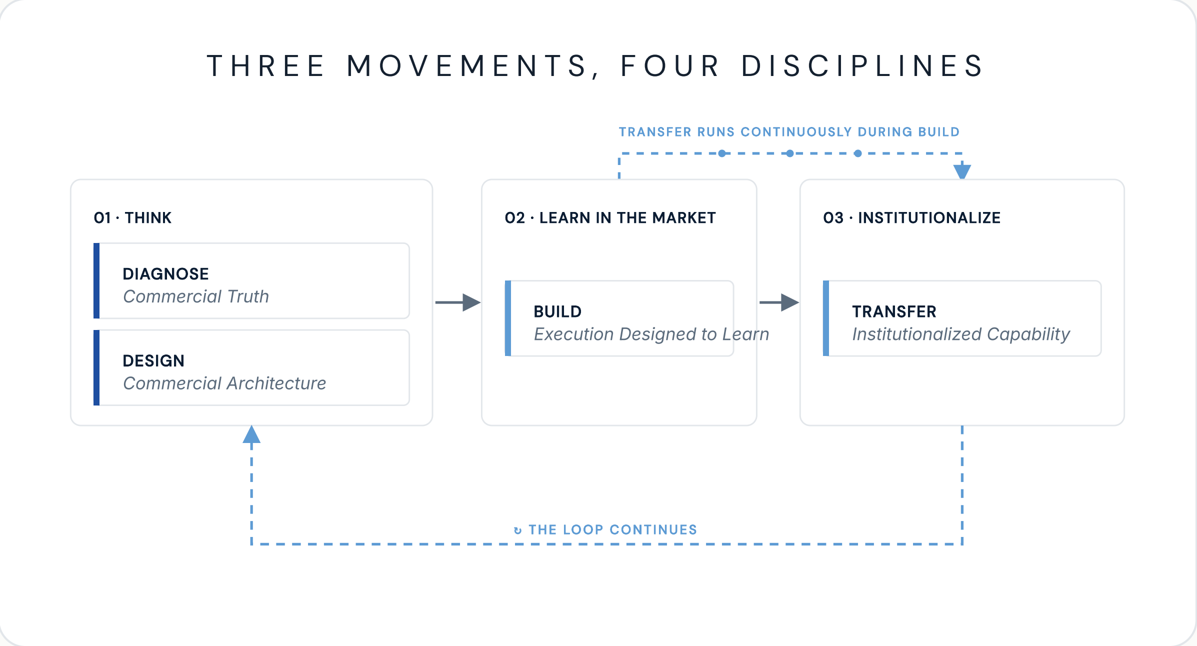

FIGURE 2 · FIRST YOU THINK, THEN YOU LEARN IN THE MARKET, THEN YOU INSTITUTIONALIZE

PART I

Reality

Diagnose: Commercial Truth

DIAGNOSE •

Commercial Truth

We had a product that was genuinely good and that almost nobody knew they needed. A large financial-information and exchange company had acquired a smaller one whose software digitized how a board of directors runs its work: the scheduling, the materials, the votes, the record, the whole recurring process that surrounds a board meeting. The technology was excellent. It did a hard thing beautifully. And it had almost no customers, not because people looked at it and said no, but because nobody understood what it was for.

The acquiring company had a strategy, and on paper it was elegant. Fold the product into its corporate-solutions division and sell it to the directors themselves. There is a reason that looked smart. Directors sit on more than one board. Map them out and you get something close to a web, a small world in which a few hundred people occupy thousands of seats, each one connected to the next by the rooms they share. Win one influential director and, in theory, you reach every board that director sits on, and then the boards those other directors sit on, outward through the network. Influence the person and you inherit the map.

So the entire pitch was built to aim straight at the board members. Look how much better this is than a paper binder. And the directors were sophisticated, accomplished, polite people. They looked at it and thought, that is nice, and then they went back to their assistants and their leather folders and a week that our beautiful product had changed by exactly nothing. Sophisticated did not mean buyer. These were some of the most accomplished people in business, and they were the wrong people to sell to, because nothing about their day hurt.

What turned it was not a customer. It was a conversation I could only have because of where I already was. The company was large enough to have its own board, and any company with a board has someone whose job is to run the process around it. So I went down the hall to our own corporate secretary, and I did the thing you almost never get to do in front of a prospect. I made myself the one without the answers. I said, we bought this product, here's what it does, this is how we are trying to sell it, and the market is not moving. Before I show you anything, walk me through what your work actually is. What happens between now and the next board meeting.

The response was, oh, where do I start? And then it came out in a flood. Collecting materials from the CFO, the CEO, legal, investor relations, every business unit, all of them late, all of them sending a different version. Assembling it into one clean book. Rebuilding the whole thing on Thursday when the CFO's numbers were revised. The revisions that landed the night before. The separate packets for each committee. The voting, the attendance, the record that had to prove who saw what and when, because this is governance and someday a regulator or a court might ask. Printing, assembling and shipping. An enormous, painful, recurring grind, quarter after quarter, and every ounce of it lived with the person running the process, not the director viewing the result. Only then did I open the laptop and show her the platform, and two things happened in the same instant. She saw something that could take the worst part of each quarter away and make it survivable, and I saw that we had spent months trying to solve a problem for people who did not have it, while the people who had it were sitting inside our own building, unasked.

That is the discipline hiding inside that story, and it is worth naming plainly, because it is the thing most companies skip. Before you can sell anything, you have to find the person whose day the product actually changes, and you almost never find them by pitching. You find them by interviewing someone as if they were a customer, in a conversation where you are allowed to be the one who does not know. It does not have to be a prospect. It can be a stakeholder inside your own company, a partner, someone an early investor introduces you to. What matters is the posture. In a sales call you show up as the expert holding the solution, and the other person stays guarded. In this conversation you show up vulnerable, genuinely trying to understand a problem you are not sure you have solved, and the guard drops, and the truth comes out. A young company selling into this same market would not have a corporate secretary. The cofounders would be the ones assembling the board book at midnight. The lesson is identical. If you are selling into a world, find a friendly inside it, and have the frank, unarmed conversation before you have the confident one.

The repositioning after that became easier. We stopped selling the elegant reading experience to directors and started selling the assembling, updating, distributing, and safeguarding of the whole board process to the people who owned it. Same technology. Completely different promise. And it clicked, because for the first time we were talking to the person who lay awake over this, in the language of the thing that kept them awake.

The harder truth is how long we ran the company pointed at the wrong person while every quarter told us we were fine. The trap is worse than a single wrong guess. When a company aims at the visible participant instead of the economic buyer, it does not make the mistake once. It builds a company on top of it. The pitch is written for the director. The demo flatters the director. The pricing is justified to the director. The target list is a list of directors. The comp plan pays for meetings with directors. Every part of the commercial system gets engineered, carefully and competently, around a person who was never going to buy. The error does not sit in one slide. It is poured into the foundation, and everything true and expensive gets built on top of it.

The most dangerous commercial assumptions are rarely chosen. They are inherited. That is why the work has to start with diagnosis rather than planning. Before a company can design anything, it has to know what is actually true about its market and its buyer, and that truth is almost never the thing it already believes. I call the output of that work **Commercial Truth**. Commercial Truth is what the evidence shows about who actually buys, why they buy, and what opens the budget, not what the company assumes. It is worth being precise about why it is so hard to reach, because the difficulty is not laziness and it is not stupidity. Diligent, intelligent companies get this wrong, and they get it wrong for reasons built into how belief works.

The first reason is that assumptions feel exactly like facts. Nobody in that company ever decided, as a testable claim, that the buyer was the director. There was no meeting where someone proposed it and someone else asked how we would know. The product lived on the director's screen, so of course it was for the director. The belief arrived already wearing the clothes of a fact, and things that feel like facts do not get tested. A company only tests what it knows it is assuming, and the most expensive assumptions are the ones it never noticed it made.

The second reason is more dangerous, because experience deepens the error instead of correcting it. You would think that years of selling would eventually fix a wrong belief. Often it fortifies it. Every director demo produced a pleasant nod. The goodwill was real and it accumulated, and accumulated goodwill feels like progress, so the company did more of the thing that produced it, more polished demos for more sophisticated people who were never going to sign. Experience did not correct the mistake. It decorated it. This is the quiet danger of a long track record. You become expert at reading a response that was never the one that mattered. A smile is not pressure. Goodwill is not budget. And the more of them you collect, the more certain you grow of the belief that is quietly capping the company.

Which is why, when you finally reach the buyer, evidence has to matter more than confidence, and you have to be willing to let the one beat the other. Confidence was the feeling in the room after a good director meeting. Evidence was the corporate secretary describing the Thursday-night rebuild. One was a warm read of the wrong person. The other was the buyer's actual reality, in the buyer's own words, about the pain that actually moved money. When those two things conflict, and they conflict far more often than anyone wants to admit, confidence is the one that is lying. Diagnosis is the discipline of trusting the evidence over the feeling, and it is hardest exactly when the feeling is pleasant and the evidence is inconvenient, which is most of the time that matters.

And the last thing, the one that took me longest to understand, is that Commercial Truth is discovered, not invented. I did not sit in a conference room and design the insight that the person running the process was the buyer. I could not have. The market already knew it. The truth was sitting inside every one of our customers, and inside our own building, held by the people doing the work, and it had been sitting there the whole time. My only contribution was to stop talking long enough to go and ask. This is the part that humbles you if you let it. The clever positioning you are proud of is usually just a truth the market was holding out to you the entire time, waiting for you to be quiet enough to take it. You do not author Commercial Truth. You locate it. Which means the posture that finds it is not cleverness. It is a specific kind of listening, aimed at the person whose day the product actually changes.

This is neither rare nor careless. In most companies the person who smiles at the demo is not the one who feels the pain or controls the budget to make it stop, and no one has checked. The results a company is proudest of are often goodwill from people who were always going to be polite, and the company mistakes it for evidence that the market wants what it sells. And the belief at the center of the whole enterprise is usually the one no one ever tested, because no one ever noticed it was a belief. None of this is comfortable to see, and all of it is decisive, because everything a company builds next will be exactly as true, or as wrong, as what it holds to be true here.

> *That is why this comes first. Commercial Truth is the ground the rest of the company stands on. But knowing what is true is not the same as knowing what to do with it, and that translation, from what is true into what the company does about it, is the work of Commercial Architecture.*

PART II

Architecture

Design: Commercial Architecture

DESIGN •

Commercial Architecture

Early in my building years I was handed a business that was really several companies wearing one parent's name. It had been stitched together out of a handful of small acquisitions, all-in revenue somewhere around ten million dollars. One built governance software. One distributed corporate communications against two entrenched giants. One sold investor-intelligence services against a much larger data incumbent. The parent was a household name in its world and, quietly, the weaker player in the exact spaces these small businesses now competed in. On the org chart it looked like one company. It was not one company. It was a drawer full of assets somebody had bought and labeled a strategy.

You do not have to be a holding company to have this problem. Any company that has ever made a bolt-on acquisition, or built a second product, or hired a team to chase an adjacent buyer has faced the same fork, and most do not notice they are standing at it. When you add the second thing, are you building one cohesive commercial effort or several competing ones? The failure is quiet and it is common. Each product keeps its own pitch, its own list, its own rep, and the customer, who sees one logo, gets several disconnected companies knocking in sequence. So even if you are a single-product startup today and this story sounds like someone else's problem, hold onto it, because the day you add the second product is the day it becomes yours.

The tell in our case was embarrassing once you saw it. Four separate reps, from four parts of the company, were all calling the same chief financial officer, the same general counsel, the same investor-relations officer, tripping over each other inside the same accounts. The buyer got four disconnected pitches from one logo, which is the exact opposite of the impression a combined company is supposed to make. We were not losing to the category leaders. We were competing with ourselves, in front of the customer, four times over.

The idea was not wrong, and that is the part worth sitting with. Anyone could see that the pieces were individually good and that a customer who bought all of them would be better served than by any single incumbent. The strategy on the slide was correct: one company, more complete than anyone else in the room. And the correct strategy on the slide changed nothing about what the customer experienced, because it had never been translated into how the company actually operated. A correct idea and a working company are not the same thing, and the distance between them is exactly the work most companies never do.

A commercial idea is not repeatable because it is correct. It becomes repeatable only when the decisions behind it are built into a structure the organization can execute the same way every time, whether or not the people who had the idea are in the room. That structure is what **Commercial Architecture** means, and it is worth saying plainly what it does. Commercial Architecture converts judgment into organizational capability. It takes what a founder or an operator knows and would otherwise apply case by case, in the room, on instinct, and turns it into choices a company can run without them. It is where Commercial Truth becomes something the organization can actually operate. Most companies never build it, because they believe a strategy is a set of good ideas. It is not. A strategy the organization cannot execute the same way twice is not yet a strategy. It is a collection of ideas waiting for an architecture.

Turning scattered assets into a single, more complete solution is not something a company announces. It is something it constructs, decision by decision, until the customer feels it. Positioning came first: one account, one relationship, every capability behind it, a promise a customer could understand and a single-product incumbent could not easily answer. Then segmentation, which is as much about what a company refuses as what it chases. Then the motion. The relationship manager became a generalist who carried the whole account and pulled in a specialist at the buyer's real level of interest, so the customer got depth exactly when they wanted it and never again met four strangers from one logo. And underneath the motion, the roles that kept it alive: a farm system that promoted specialists up into relationship managers, so the talent renewed itself and the knowledge of how the whole thing worked stayed inside the company as people came and went. Each of those was a choice, made explicit, and wired into how the company ran on an ordinary day.

There is a piece of the architecture that companies leave out almost every time, and it is finance. Commercial architecture is not only how you sell; it is how you let the customer buy, and that is a commercial decision as much as a financial one. A company that is rigid about how a deal is shaped, because the standard terms protect a margin or flatter a metric, will lose deals it should win to a competitor willing to meet the buyer where they actually are. The architecture has to hold room for commercial creativity, and that means finance is not a downstream approver of deals. It is a co-author of the motion. When we designed how these accounts would be sold, the shape of the deal, the timing of the money, the way risk was carried, was designed with finance in the room, not handed to them afterward to bless.

Designing the buying, not just the selling, exposes something the market will later confirm, which is that there are really two motions, and they are not the same job. In the first, you are displacing an incumbent. The buyer already spends money on this; the budget line item exists. Your work is to prove you are better, to bring down the fear of switching, and to redirect a budget that is already flowing. In the second, there is no incumbent and no line item. Nobody is spending on this yet. The switch risk is lower, because there is nothing to switch from, but the harder job is to help a buyer create a budget that does not exist, to build the internal case that turns a nice-to-have into a funded priority. Both are difficult and they are difficult in opposite directions, and a single company will often run both at once, displacing an incumbent in one segment while creating a category in another. An architecture that pretends there is one motion will be wrong for half its market. This is the first place the design starts pointing forward, because which motion a buyer requires is part of what has to fit them, and fit is something only the market can finish teaching.

None of what I just described was a person. It was structure, written down, staffed, and repeatable. It kept running as people joined and left. It took a business worth around ten million dollars to roughly three hundred and fifty million, and it survived any single departure, which is the part that matters most. But here is the thing that took the years to teach, and it is the reason this playbook exists. What got us to ten did not get us to twenty-five. What got us to twenty-five did not get us to fifty. What got us to fifty did not get us to a hundred. At every threshold the architecture that had been right became the architecture that was holding us back, and the company that could see it and rebuild kept climbing while the version of the company that could not stalled at the size of its last good idea. The method is what I pulled out of that climb. Architecture is where it is designed. It is not where it is proven, and it is not where it stops changing.

The reason good commercial ideas so often fail to become companies is not that the ideas are bad or wrong. It is that the logic stays where it was born, in the judgment of the people who had it. A founder who wins on instinct usually has a genuinely correct read of who buys and why and what makes a deal close, but it lives as instinct, an unwritten set of moves made without naming them, and instinct does not transfer. As the company grows, new people arrive without it and improvise their own, so execution varies by person and the results scatter, and everyone blames the new people. The idea was never the constraint. The constraint was that it was never converted into explicit choices, rules, roles, and mechanisms that someone other than its authors could run. The distinction underneath this is exact. Ideas do not scale. Judgment does not scale. People do not scale. Architecture scales. Everything that made the first success possible, the insight, the instinct, the particular people, is precisely what cannot produce the second one on its own. Only what has been converted into architecture repeats.

This is where the word architecture earns its precision, because it is constantly confused with the artifacts that describe it, and the confusion is expensive. Documentation matters, and it is where this has to start. Product does not begin engineering without a spec, and a commercial system should not begin scaling without its own written account of how it wins. So write it down: who the company sells to and who it refuses, why it wins, how a deal moves, who owns which call. That is the necessary first act. But it is only the first act, and here is where most companies stop and pay for it later. A document holds what a person did. It does not hold how they decided. The reasoning that produced the play, the read of the room that told a good operator to bend here and hold firm there, does not live in the steps. It lives in the person who wrote them, and when that person is not standing over the document explaining it, a new hire gets the moves without the meaning and runs them on the wrong situations with great confidence.

So Commercial Architecture is not the paperwork. It is the set of commercial decisions themselves, and the reasoning underneath them, made explicit enough that the company executes them the same way with or without the people who first made them. Capturing that reasoning is real work, and it does not happen through the written word alone. It happens when decisions are explained and not just announced. It happens in recorded working sessions where the thinking is spoken aloud. It happens in role-play, where a new person has to make the call and gets corrected on the reasoning, not just the outcome. It happens when the calls the best operators run are captured and turned into a living library, so the documentation is not a static description of what to do but a record of how it is actually done, and why. Enablement has a real part to play here, because enablement is what takes that content and makes it accessible, shareable, and teachable across a growing team. But enablement distributes the architecture; it does not create it. The architecture is the underlying decisions and the reasoning behind them. Confuse the document with the architecture, and a company will keep polishing artifacts while the thing they were meant to encode still lives in a few people's heads.

So the law underneath this discipline is simple and unforgiving. **Judgment builds the first success. Architecture builds every one after it. Strategy fails when it cannot become architecture.** A company rarely dies from a shortage of good ideas. It dies because a good idea never became something other people could run, and so the company stayed the size of the people who had it. The distance between an idea and an operating system, between individual excellence and company capability, is not attitude and it is not effort. It is architecture, and it gets built on purpose or it does not get built at all.

> *Architecture can make the motion coherent. It cannot make it true. A design is a hypothesis about how buyers will behave, and it cannot confirm itself; that happens in the next discipline, where the design finally meets the thing it was built to predict.*

PART III

Validation

Build: Execution Designed to Learn

BUILD

Execution Designed to Learn

We had one product, and it was better than what the incumbent offered. Not a little better. Much better. We were getting into real sales processes, in front of people who wanted it. And then, over and over, right near the end, they pulled back. Come back to us later. Not now.

Before the story, the shape of it, because it is more common than it looks. A great many companies are in exactly this position: a genuinely better product, sold against a competitor that is not really a standalone competitor at all, but one piece of a much larger enterprise that sells a bundled solution. You are selling one excellent thing. They are selling forty things wrapped together, and the one you compete with is buried inside the wrapper. If that is not you, it may be because you created the category and have no serious incumbent yet, or because your competitor is still small and independent. Enjoy it, and do not assume it lasts forever. Categories consolidate. The day a large platform acquires your competitor and folds it into a suite is the day you start swimming upstream against a bundle, and everything in this chapter becomes your problem. So read it as a lesson in how markets actually behave, not as a story about one deal.

For too long I read the stall the way most sellers read it, as a timing objection. Bad quarter, budget already spent, catch me next year. A timing objection has an obvious response, follow up and wait, so that is what I did. It is the most natural move in the world, and it teaches you nothing, because it settles in advance what the stall meant and asks the market for nothing further. When enough of them said the same thing, the pattern got too loud to keep filing under timing, so I stopped waiting and took it apart. It was not timing. It was unresolved risk wearing a calendar for a costume. There were two things underneath, and neither one had anything to do with the season.

The first was in the pricing, and it was invisible from inside the building. Our product replaced one piece of what the incumbent sold, but the incumbent did not sell that piece on its own. They sold a bundle. So the customer did the math in their head, and the math was wrong in a way that worked against us. Say our product costs fifteen thousand. The buyer assumes they will cancel the piece they currently get from the incumbent, free up that fifteen thousand, and simply point it at us. Even trade. Except that is not how a bundle prices. Inside the bundle, that single piece was never really worth fifteen thousand on its own; it was cheap to keep because it was carried by everything around it. Cancel it and the buyer does not recover fifteen thousand. They recover a fraction of it, because the rest of the bundle holds its price. So the buyer who thought they had a full budget to redirect suddenly finds they have to come up with most of our price as new money. The incumbent bill barely moves. The point is that the budget the buyer was counting on to pay us was never really there, and it was killing our deals quietly, in a spreadsheet we never saw. That was not a selling problem. It was a pricing problem, and we fixed the price to the real math, and deals that no amount of better positioning would have moved started moving.

The second thing was quieter and it was the real one. For example, their contract with the incumbent ended December 31. Our product had to be live January 1. One day, no overlap, no fallback if something broke during the most visible moment of their year. We were asking them to leap a gap with no bridge and bet their quarter on a vendor they had known for a few months. Of course they froze. Come back next year was not procrastination. It was a person declining to jump a cliff we had not built a bridge over.

So we built the bridge. Sign earlier and the billing did not start until the incumbent contract actually ended, which gave the buyer roughly three months of overlap to move at their own pace. No double paying, no stranded month with two live vendors, no hard cutover on a single terrifying day. And come back next year stopped being the answer, because the thing underneath it was gone. We had not made the product any better. We had made the decision less dangerous. We had not overcome an objection. We had redesigned the way the customer bought, and building that bridge was a commercial and a financial decision at once, which is exactly why finance belongs inside the architecture and not downstream of it.

The specific fix is not the lesson; run it on a buyer who is not afraid of the switch and you will have given away three months for nothing. The lesson is where the fix came from. None of it came from the plan, which said the product was better and the market would reward the better product. It was coherent, and wrong in two exact ways no one inside the company could have reasoned out, because the information was not inside the company. It lived only in the market, in the gap between the math we imagined and the math the buyer actually did, in the fear hiding inside a polite delay. The architecture proposed. The market disposed. This is the trap that swallows years. A company can execute relentlessly, quarter after quarter, and preserve the very mistake it is working so hard to outrun, because effort spent on a wrong assumption produces nothing but a great deal of well-run wrongness. Motion is not progress. Companies do not become better because they execute longer. They become better because they change what they execute, and they learn what to change only when the market has told them.

That is what separates two companies that look identical from across the room, both busy, both executing. For one, execution is the implementation of a plan: it runs the motion to hit the number, and when the market resists it reaches for the explanation that asks nothing of it, timing or budget or a soft quarter. And it executes harder. That company cannot learn, because a plan being implemented has no channel to hear anything it did not already believe. For the other, execution is a disciplined process for discovering reality: every deal is a question put to the market, every stall is data, every loss a finding, and that company pulls ahead not by executing more but by learning faster than the one still arguing with its own pipeline. Underneath both is the same relationship between a plan and the work. A plan is what a company believes. Execution is how the market tells it what is true.

Here is the honest objection, and it deserves an answer, because most companies believe they already do this. They do course-correct. When a real headwind hits, or a competitor makes a move, or the macro turns, they react. They update the collateral, change the pricing, tell the field to stop saying the old thing and start saying the new one. That is real, and it is not nothing. But look at when it happens. It happens on big events, at major milestones, when something forces it. It is course correction as an emergency response, not as a habit, and a muscle used only as defense versus offense is never strong when it matters. The company that learns fastest does this continuously and on purpose, in small increments, when nothing is on fire, so that reading the market and adjusting is not a fire drill but the way the place runs. The point of Build is to build that muscle, to make the loop between the market and the motion so ordinary that the company is adjusting before the headwind is big enough to have a name.

And building that muscle asks something specific of the people at the edge, the ones in front of customers. Most companies, when they change the motion, hand the field the new decision and stop there. Say this now. Price it this way. Lead with that. What they do not hand over is the reasoning, and so the field can recite the change but cannot carry it, cannot answer the question underneath it, cannot flex it when the buyer pushes in a direction the script did not anticipate. A client-facing team that only has the decision performs like a team reading a card. A client-facing team that understands why the decision was made speaks like the executive who made it, and can hold a real conversation at the buyer's level. This is the same principle as the architecture, arriving in a different room: it is never enough to hand over the play. You have to hand over the thinking that produced it.

Living inside that relationship asks something of a company that effort cannot supply. A company can do everything right and still be told no: the architecture coherent, the team good, the execution disciplined, the leadership certain, and the answer still no, with every internal virtue intact. Most commercial failure is not weak execution. Plenty of failing companies execute beautifully. It is the substitution of internal certainty for external truth, the assumption that a plan sound inside the building must be sound outside it. The market is the only authority that can settle that, and it is not grading effort. It is revealing reality. So its no is not resistance to be overpowered. It is information. The market is never wrong. It is only telling you something you have not understood yet.

Which is why execution, which produces nothing on its own, is worth what it is worth: it is the only thing that gives the market the chance to answer, and that answer is the only evidence that counts. Execution creates no value. What it exposes does. Run the motion for a quarter and change nothing, and it was activity, however busy it looked and however healthy the dashboards read. Change the architecture because the market revealed something the company had not understood, and it created knowledge. That is the purpose of Build, and the whole distance between a company that is moving and one that is improving.

This is also why the architecture has to be held a particular way. If the pricing and the switch had been treated as settled, written in Sharpie because a smart team had reasoned them out, the stall would have stayed a mystery or hardened into an excuse. The correction was only possible because nothing in the motion was above being overruled by evidence. Companies get this wrong in both directions. Write the motion in Sharpie and you will defend a mistake for a year while the market keeps trying to tell you. Redraw it every week on every stray reaction and you learn nothing either, because you never hold a version still long enough to find out whether it worked. So the motion is kept in pencil, not Sharpie. Firm enough to run and to read honestly, soft enough to correct the moment the market says correct. That is not indecision. It is the only handwriting that lets a company be both committed and still learning.

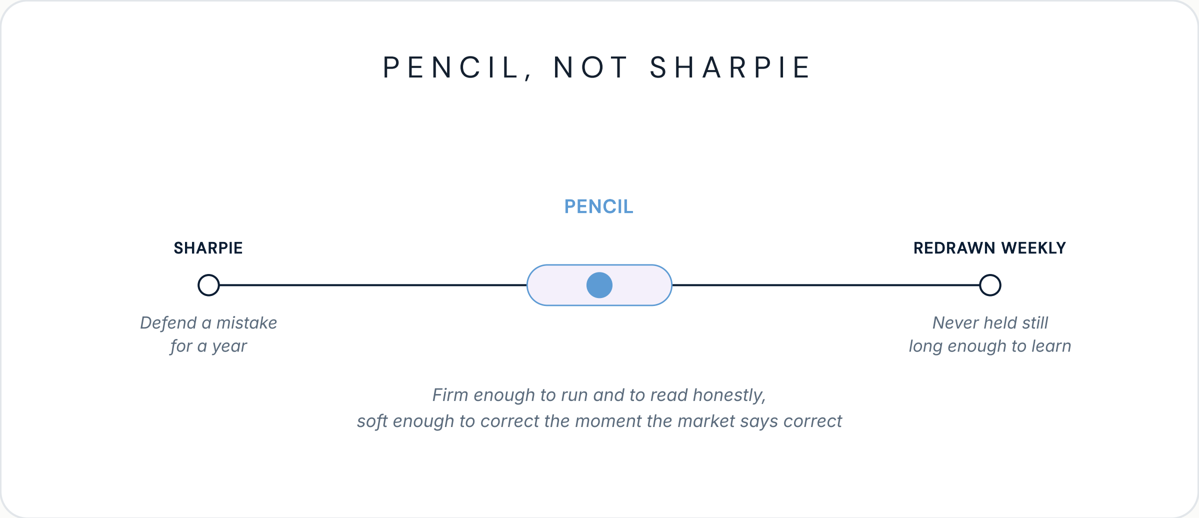

FIGURE 3 · HELD FIRMLY ENOUGH TO TEST, PROVISIONALLY ENOUGH TO REVISE

The market does not only correct the motion. It teaches you that there is rarely one motion. The same product sold into a large enterprise and into a smaller company is not the same sale, because the buyers do not decide the same way. The enterprise buyer moves through committees and procurement and risk review; the smaller buyer decides in a room, faster, on different fears. The way you sell, the proof you bring, the risk you retire, the pace you set, all of it has to fit how that particular buyer actually decides, and a motion tuned for one will misfire on the other. So a single company often needs more than one fit, sometimes several, designed deliberately by segment and validated separately, each one a hypothesis the market confirms or corrects. This is what the architecture could only anticipate and Build has to finish. Fit is not a setting you choose once. It is a match you keep making, buyer by buyer, segment by segment, and getting it right for each is part of what turns a motion into an engine.

The same logic is why a company proves the motion before it scales the motion. Had we taken the original version, better product, wrong pricing, no bridge, and poured headcount and volume onto it, we would not have grown. We would have scaled the stall and hired a team to be confused by it at ten times the cost. Execution built to learn runs a minimum viable motion first, deliberately small, precisely so it can find the bundle math and the missing bridge while they are still cheap to find. A company scales the motion the market has confirmed, never the one it hopes the market will confirm. Scaling ahead of that confirmation is not ambition. It is multiplying an untested assumption and calling the multiplication growth.

> *This is where the sequence stops being a line and becomes a loop, with each turn through the market making the truth more accurate and the motion more fit. But a loop that lives in the people who ran it is not yet an engine. It is a very sophisticated dependency, and making it belong to the organization instead of to those people is the last discipline, the one almost no company finishes.*

PART IV

Capability

Transfer: Institutionalized Capability

TRANSFER

Institutionalized Capability

For years, the request came the same way. Someone would ask to pick my brain on a weekend, and I would sit on a phone and try to pour a career of pattern recognition down the line in an hour. I did it in person too. I wrote training decks. I sat beside people and walked them through how to read a company before a first call, what to listen for, where the real pain usually hides, which objection matters and which is noise. And the same knowledge, delivered the same way, landed completely differently every time. One person absorbed almost all of it. Another took in less than half. A third memorized the steps precisely and missed the thinking entirely, and went out and ran the moves on the wrong companies with great confidence. The best commercial judgment I had kept leaking out unevenly, because it was moving by hand, one head at a time, and no two heads caught the same thing.

That inconsistency is a small window onto the thing that quietly caps most companies. For most of my career my work was to cure businesses of depending on the few people who happened to carry the commercial story in their heads: a founder, a founding team, a first sales leader, the early hires who had been there when it worked. But the condition has a name larger than any of them. It is **knowledge dependency**, critical commercial knowledge living in people instead of in a system, and it does not care whose people they are. It can sit in a founder, in a handful of early employees, in a regional leader, or in the outside operator brought in to fix it. It does not have to be one person. It rarely is. It only has to be few enough that their leaving takes the company's understanding of its own market out the door with them.

What took me too long to accept is that this is not an accident or a failure of diligence. It is the default. Knowledge is born in a head. Left alone, it stays there, and a company quietly arranges itself around whoever holds it, because that is the path of least resistance for everyone, the holders included. Dependency is not a thing companies decide to build. It is what accumulates when no one does the specific, deliberate work of building the alternative. So the interesting question is not how companies end up dependent on individuals. That takes care of itself. The question is why so few ever build their way out, when nearly all of them are sure they already have.

They are sure because they did the obvious thing. Write it down. As the last discipline argued, that is the necessary first act, and it is where transfer begins. But documentation holds what people did, not how they decided, and this is the point the whole method keeps circling back to, because it is the one companies most need to hear. The judgment underneath the steps is the asset. The steps are just its shadow on paper. A playbook can tell a new rep exactly what worked in a situation that already happened. It cannot tell them how to read the situation in front of them that no one has seen before, and commercial work is almost entirely situations no one has seen before. This is why a company can document everything and still depend completely on the handful of people who can actually think. What got written down was the output of judgment, never the judgment itself.

So let me be specific about what actually has to transfer, because for a long time I could not have told you, which is exactly why it would not leave my head. When I read a company, I am gathering things: what its hiring says about where it thinks it is going, what its public filings and its funding say about the pressure it is under, what its product and its pricing reveal about who it really serves, what the people inside let slip about where it hurts. None of those pieces means much alone. The skill, the part that felt like instinct, is holding all of them at once and synthesizing them into a single narrative about what is actually true and what to do about it. That synthesis is the judgment. And what took me years to understand is that it is not magic and it is not unteachable. It is a method. It can be named, the inputs can be named, the way they combine into a story can be named, and once named it can be handed over, and scaled far beyond what any one person's weekend phone calls could ever reach. Institutionalizing that reading, and the transfer of it, is where the discipline finally becomes a capability the company owns rather than a favor it keeps asking of a few tired experts.

So the real test of transfer is not whether something was written down. It is whether the thinking has left your head. Whether someone else can face a situation you never discussed, see what actually matters in it, and make the decision you would have made, well, without you in the room. That is a far steeper requirement than a handoff, and it is the only one that produces capability instead of paper. It is also why transfer is not an event at the end, a box checked the day a founder finally steps back. It runs the entire time the engine is being built, in every review where a decision is explained instead of merely announced, in every recorded call that becomes a lesson, in every role-play where a new person makes the read and gets corrected on the reasoning. Small lessons move immediately. Larger ones accumulate into deliberate revisions. The deepest ones reshape how the whole company reads its market. Transfer runs underneath all the other work, continuously, and it finishes only when the organization can think without the people who taught it how. That capacity, the company arriving at the next decision correctly on its own, is what the word capability actually means, and it is the whole output of the discipline.

A company that cannot run the system without the person who built it does not have a system. It has a dependency. That is the law the entire method has been walking toward, and it holds whether the person is one founder or the few who quietly carry the company between them, because everything earlier can be genuinely excellent and still belong to them. The truth, the architecture, the motion the market has validated, all of it can sit in a few heads and produce wonderful results, right up until those heads walk out the door and take the company's understanding of its own market with them. Transfer is the discipline that decides whether a company owns the engine or merely rents the people who are one. **People always eventually leave. Only what was transferred stays.**

> *This is the discipline almost no company finishes, and it is the one that changes what a company is: from a group of talented people that lasts exactly as long as they stay into an institution that can read its market, decide, and win on its own. What that is worth, and to whom, is the next thing to understand.*

PART V

The Commercial Engine

The Commercial Engine · Commercial Readiness · Capital Readiness

THE COMMERCIAL ENGINE •

The Commercial Engine

The test of a commercial engine is a departure.

Someone leaves. The person who carried the largest accounts, or read the market better than anyone else in the building, or simply knew, without ever being able to fully explain how, which deals were real and which were noise. Or it is not one person but a few, the small group who between them held the whole picture. In one company, the market never notices they are gone. Deals keep closing. The forecast holds. The next people come up to speed on a system that was ready for them. In another company, the pipeline that looked so healthy the week before quietly comes apart, and everyone discovers, a quarter too late, that what they had been calling a system was those few people, and now they have left.

DEPENDENCY	COMMERCIAL ENGINE
Rises and falls with a few people	*Outlives any particular person*
Critical commercial knowledge lives in one person or a few people.	Market understanding and commercial judgment have become organizational capability.
Performance depends on their continued presence.	The system can continue learning and operating without any particular person.

FIGURE 4 · THE DEPARTURE IS THE TEST THAT TELLS THE TWO APART

Both companies had revenue. Both had a team, a process, a stack of tools, a number they hit last year. From across the room they looked identical. The departure is the only thing that told them apart. But the departure is a test, not a definition. It reveals whether an engine is there; it is not the engine itself. What it was testing for is visible only in what the four disciplines build when they are working, because that is the thing a departure either survives or exposes.

That thing has a name. It is what the four disciplines have been building from the beginning. Commercial Truth, turned into Commercial Architecture, tested and corrected in the market by Build, and made into organizational capability by Transfer, is a **Commercial Engine**. It is the system that turns market understanding into repeatable revenue without depending on the intuition, heroics, or effort of any one person or any few. The word that carries the definition is depending. Not a company without people. A company that does not rise and fall with any particular ones of them.

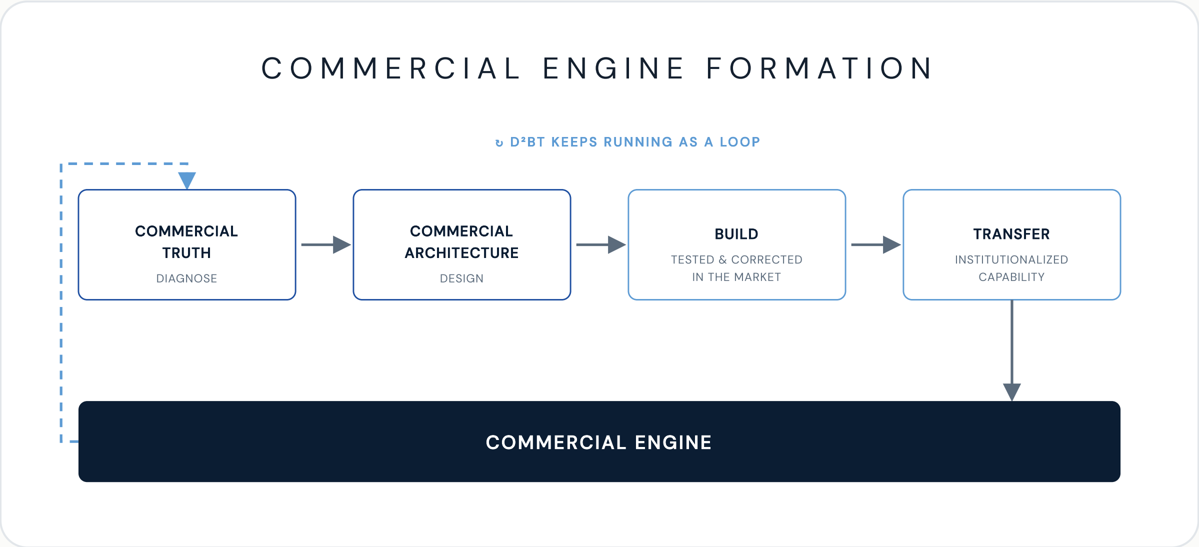

FIGURE 5 · TRUTH TO ARCHITECTURE, CORRECTED BY BUILD, INSTITUTIONALIZED BY TRANSFER

An engine is not a funnel and it is not a plan. A plan runs the same play until it stops working, and usually a while after that, because a plan has no way to hear that it has stopped. An engine is a loop that learns, and the loop is D²BT itself, running not once but continuously. This is where the throughline closes. Diagnose establishes what is currently true about the market. Design converts that truth into a commercial hypothesis, a set of explicit choices about how the company will win. Build exposes the hypothesis to the market and lets the market confirm it or correct it. Transfer turns what was learned into capability the organization holds rather than a lesson a few people carry. And then the market answers again, and the answer starts the loop over from a more accurate truth than the last one began with, so that the truth sharpens, the architecture tightens, the fit improves, and the capability compounds, turn after turn. Each handoff from one discipline to the next was the loop being drawn. The bundle that sent us back to redesign the price, the segment that needed its own fit, the correction that had to be transferred before it could stick, all of it was the same engine turning. That is why an engine understands more this quarter than it did last, and more next quarter than it does now. It improves on purpose, as a property of how it is built, whether or not the people who first built it are still in the room.

This is worth saying plainly, because the engine is constantly confused with three things it is not, and each confusion sends a company somewhere expensive.

It is not sales. Sales is a function inside the engine, the act of winning a customer. A company can have genuinely excellent salespeople and no engine at all, because the knowledge of why those people win lives inside them and leaves when they log off at night. Great selling is worth a great deal and it is still not a system. Sales is what a company does. The engine is what makes the doing repeatable by someone who was not there when it was first figured out.

It is not go-to-market. A go-to-market is a plan for how a company reaches its buyer, a motion chosen and put into the field. It is an input to the engine, not the engine itself. A motion can be elegant and wrong, and left alone it will stay wrong, defended quarter after quarter by the people who designed it. The engine is not the motion. It is the system that puts the motion in front of the market, reads the verdict honestly, and changes the motion when the market says change. A plan believes. An engine finds out.

It is not revenue operations. Revenue operations is the instrumentation, the tooling and the reporting and the measurement that keep the machine visible and running cleanly, and no serious company does without it. But instrumentation measures a motion; it cannot tell a company whether the motion is built on a buyer that actually exists. Wire a beautiful dashboard onto a misidentified buyer and the result is a mistake a company can watch in high resolution, in real time, while it fails. The plumbing is necessary, and it is not the thing it serves.

What the engine actually is, underneath all three, is organizational capability. It is the system that connects market truth, explicit commercial decisions, execution in the market, the learning that execution returns, and the institutional ability to do all of it again without the people who did it first. That is a different kind of asset than a good quarter or a strong team. A good quarter is an event. A strong team is a group of people. Capability is a property of the organization, and it is the one thing on that list a company still owns the morning after its best people resign.

Which is why building the engine is the right way, and it is worth being direct about why, because a company under pressure will almost always reach for one of three faster answers instead, and each one, on its own, leaves the same problem in place.

The first is to hire the problem away. Bring in a proven commercial leader to fix it. The problem is not hiring a leader. It is hiring a leader to become the engine rather than to build one. A leader brought in merely to carry the number recreates the dependency in a more expensive head, and when they leave, and eventually they leave, the company is exactly where it started, poorer and a year older. A leader brought in to diagnose the truth, design the architecture, validate it in the market, and transfer what was learned is doing something else entirely: building the capability and then handing it over. An experienced operator can accelerate that build enormously. But the work is complete only when the company owns what the operator helped it discover and build. Hiring can staff an engine. It cannot substitute for one.

The second is to buy the problem away. Add the platform, the data, the tooling, and let the stack impose the discipline the company lacks. But tools multiply whatever is already there. Point them at a validated motion and they scale it; point them at an assumption no one tested and they scale that instead, faster, at a larger cost, with a bigger number to miss at the end. A stack accelerates a truth. It cannot manufacture one.

The third is to keep riding the instinct that got the company here. The founders sold it into existence, so let them keep carrying it. That works, longer than it should, right up until it does not, because instinct does not transfer and the company quietly stays the exact size of the people holding it.

Each of these can play a real part inside an engine. None of them builds one alone, because each leaves the company's ability to win sitting inside a person or a tool instead of inside the organization. Building the engine is the durable alternative, because it is the one effort that turns individual judgment into capability the company owns.

Sales, go-to-market, and revenue operations are functions a company operates. A Commercial Engine is a capability the company owns. A process depends on the people running it. An engine outlives them.

> *And that raises the one question a company has to answer before it spends another dollar trying to grow. Revenue is not the proof; the proof is whether the engine holds when the market runs its tests: the departure, the downturn, the buyer who changes their mind. Knowing that before those tests arrive, rather than after, is its own discipline. It is called readiness.*

COMMERCIAL READINESS

Commercial Readiness

Every company eventually decides to pour fuel on the fire. It hires the team, raises the round, opens the new segment, doubles the target. And it makes that decision on the assumption that there is an engine underneath to accelerate. Most of the time, no one has checked. The company has revenue, the revenue has been growing, and growth is read as proof that the machine exists. Then the market runs one of its tests, a key person leaves, a quarter turns, a buyer who always said yes says no, and the company finds out what it actually had. By then the finding is a postmortem. The fuel has already been spent.

Readiness is the discipline of finding out before. It is the difference between believing the engine is real and knowing it, on evidence, while there is still time to build what is missing. And it begins with a distinction most companies never draw. Readiness is not a feeling. People speak of it the way they speak of momentum, as a sense that things are clicking, but a mood is not a measurement, and no company ever spent a mood on a hire or a raise. Readiness is a set of specific conditions that either exist or do not, and they can be looked at plainly, one at a time, before a dollar is committed to growth.

There are five. The first is Commercial Truth: whether the company can name the buyer it actually serves and point to the pressure that actually opens the budget, rather than describe a market in the abstract. This is what Diagnose leaves behind, and everything above it rests on it. The second is Positioning: whether the company's promise repels the wrong buyer as clearly as it attracts the right one, or whether it could belong to ten other companies without changing a word. This is the first test of Commercial Architecture. The third is Repeatability: whether the motion closes deals that do not all run through the same few people, or whether the pipeline is a handful of individuals wearing the costume of a system. This is what Build proves, and it is the condition a departure tests most directly. The fourth is Fit: whether the motion matches how the real buyer actually decides, rather than how the company wishes they decided. And because a single company often sells to more than one kind of buyer, an enterprise that decides by committee and a smaller company that decides in a room are not one market, fit is rarely a single setting. It is whether the company has designed the right motion for each buyer it serves, rather than forcing one motion onto buyers who do not share a decision. A motion can be repeatable and still be tuned to the wrong decision, which is why fit is its own condition and not a restatement of the third. The fifth is Adaptability: whether the company changes its playbook because the market moved, or only after a crisis forces it to. This is Transfer and the pencil, the capacity to keep learning, and it sits underneath the other four rather than beside them.

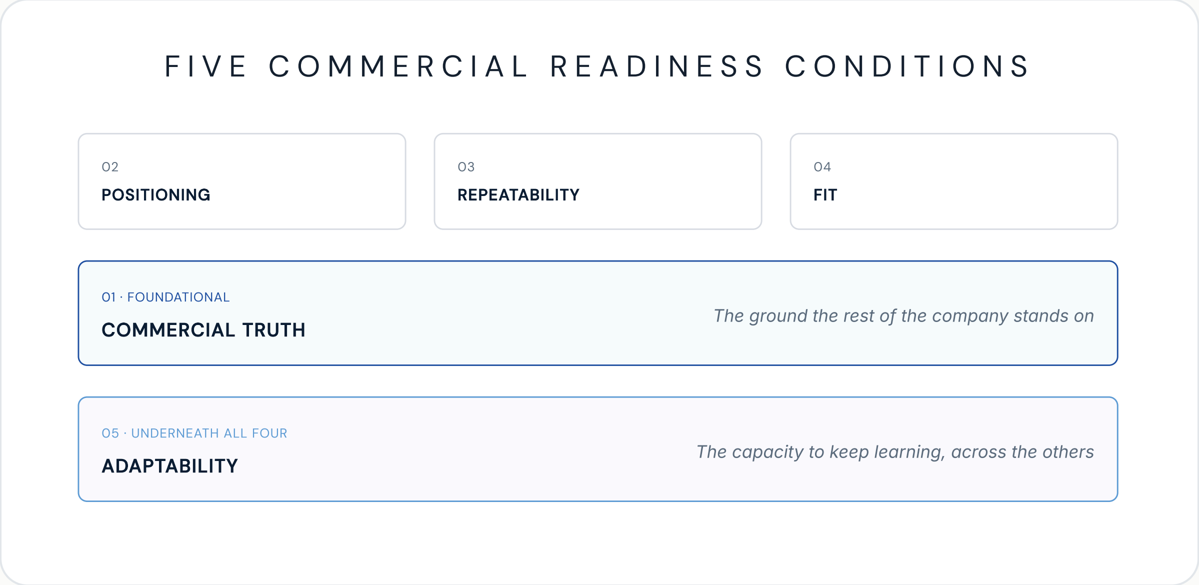

FIGURE 6 · TRUTH BENEATH THE STRUCTURE, ADAPTABILITY BENEATH EVERYTHING

Read together, those five are the closest thing there is to a definition. A company is commercially ready when it holds a true account of its buyer, a positioning only it can own, a motion that repeats without a particular few people, a motion matched to how each of its buyers actually decides, and the capacity to change all of it on evidence. Readiness is not confidence that the engine will work. It is evidence that it already does, in conditions a company can name, look at, and score.

This is also where the method asks to be believed, on the only terms that should persuade anyone. It does not ask a company to take its word. It names five conditions and invites the company to check. A framework that explains everything and can be tested by nothing is a belief. One that names the specific things that must be true, and can be wrong about a given company, is a method. Commercial readiness is where Commercial by Design becomes checkable, against any company, including the reader's own.

The order among the five is not negotiable, and it is the most useful thing the list has to teach. Commercial Truth comes before positioning, positioning before motion, a working motion before the hire meant to inherit it. Weakness at the top quietly poisons everything beneath it. A brilliant motion built on a misidentified buyer is only a faster way to the wrong place, and a company that reads itself from the bottom up will keep repairing symptoms while the cause sits untouched at the top. The temptation, looking at a list like this, is to grade gently. The more useful move is the opposite. An uncomfortable answer is not a verdict on the company or the people in it. It is a map, and it tells a company exactly what to build first.

> *Readiness is where a company holds the description up against itself and sees what it actually has, and the five conditions, turned into questions a company can score, become the closing assessment. What a ready engine is finally worth, and to whom, is the last thing left to understand.*

CAPITAL READINESS

Capital Readiness

Every company that raises capital is making a growth promise. The size of the round changes the size of the promise, not its nature. Whether a company raises five million dollars or a hundred, it has told a group of people that the business will grow faster than it has, on a timeline it has never had to hit, and it has taken their money against that word. The celebration on the day the round closes obscures what actually happened. The money is not the achievement. The obligation attached to it is.

And capital buys almost everything except the one thing that decides whether any of it works. It funds hiring, tools, marketing, expansion, and time. It cannot tell a company who actually buys, or why, or what motion turns a stranger into a customer, or whether the knowledge required to win exists anywhere outside a few people's heads. Those are not things capital can purchase. They are things a company has to learn, validate, and turn into a system. Capital does not make a company commercially ready. Commercial readiness determines whether the capital can do what the company promised it would.

What capital actually does is accelerate. It pours speed onto whatever commercial reality is already there, and it is indifferent to which one it finds. Where the architecture underneath is sound, where there is real Commercial Truth and a motion someone other than the founder can run, capital scales a validated system and the promise has a chance of coming true. Where the architecture is not there, capital does not supply it. It buys more people, more tools, and more activity to stack on top of assumptions no one tested, and it lets a company do that faster, at a larger scale, with a bigger number to miss at the end. Capital does not make a motion repeatable. It exposes whether it already is.

This reverses the sequence most founders carry in their heads, in which the raise is the milestone that makes growth possible. It is the other way around. Before the raise, commercial readiness is what makes the growth case credible in the first place. A ready company can explain, in an operator's terms, why the growth is real: who buys, why they buy, why now, why this segment, why this price, why this motion, what has been validated and what is still an assumption. That is a commercial architecture, and it lets the people underwriting the next stage of the company see how the next dollar becomes growth. The weaker version is a headcount plan, reps times quota marching up and to the right. One is evidence. The other is the same spreadsheet in a better suit.

After the raise, commercial readiness is what determines whether the capital produces durable growth or merely faster loss. The round arrives with a target, a hiring plan, a board cadence, and a runway clock, and every one of them quietly assumes the engine is already running. If it is not, the money does not buy time. It spends it. A round is meant to accelerate a motion that has already earned the right to scale, not to fund a company's first attempt to figure out how it sells. Prove the selling, then pour capital on the proof. Do it in the other order and the raise has not reduced the risk. It has financed it.

And it does not end at the next raise. Eventually a company has to show what the money produced, and the people who look then include an investor, a board, a lender, or an acquirer. They are not only reading the revenue number. They are reading the quality of it. How concentrated it is. Whether it renews. Whether it holds its price. Whether the pipeline is real. Commercial credibility is what creates investability. Not because readiness guarantees a round, it does not. It makes a company easier to understand, easier to underwrite, and more believable when it explains how it turns capital into durable growth. A company is capital-ready when the growth it is about to fund rests on a system it owns rather than the people it depends on, so that capital accelerates proof instead of financing the search for it. **Commercial readiness precedes capital readiness.**

> *Which means the thing being underwritten, in the end, is not financial. Capital can be raised on a promise. The promise can only be kept by a system. It is a question that eventually turns from the company to the people who built it, and, for one of them, it turned all the way around.*

CLOSING

Build the Engine, Do Not Be It

I spent a career building these for other people, and I have to tell you where the idea finally came home, because for a long time I could not see it, and when I did it reorganized everything I thought I knew about the work. My whole career was the removal of a single disease. A founder, a founding team, the few who got something to work carry the commercial story around in their heads, and they hand me the download so I can build the system that runs without them. I was good at it. And one day I saw what I had actually been doing. I had spent years curing companies of depending on a few people and, without ever noticing, made a long line of them depend on me. The pipeline ran through me. The read on a market, the instinct for where a deal was stuck, all of it sat in one head, and the head was mine. I had been the cure, and I had quietly become the disease. In every story I could tell about this work, the last person standing between a company and its own engine was the person they hired to remove exactly that.

The discipline I preached and skipped was my own Transfer. I had handed over pieces of the method for years, inside companies and teams, and I had never once assembled the whole of it somewhere it could leave me completely. There was always a document at the turning point, the repositioning written down, the unified team written down, because the artifact is where an engine starts, the moment knowledge becomes more than a few heads can hold. But I had never written down the thinking behind all of it in one place. That is what this playbook turned out to be. Writing it was not documenting my process. It was completing the transfer.

Which leaves you where every company eventually stands, in front of the same quiet decision. Most will read this, nod, and reach for the easy lever anyway, because the pressure is real and the familiar doors are right there. A few will not. A few will set it down, get honest about where the business actually stands, and start building at the top of the list. If that is you, you are the reason it exists. And some will recognize that it is time for the deeper build and will not want to do it alone. If that is where you are, the door is open. That is not a pitch. It is an invitation to a conversation you will have earned by getting honest with yourself first.

Either way the work is the same, and it starts where it always has. Not with more noise. Not with a rescue. Not with a baton handed to one more pair of hands. It starts with the quiet, deliberate decision to take the best thinking out of a few people's heads and build the engine the company owns.

> Build the engine. Do not be it.

You cannot hire your way out of a commercial engine you have not built.

THE ASSESSMENT

Commercial Readiness

The Commercial Readiness Assessment

HOW TO USE IT

The Commercial Readiness Assessment

Everything to this point has described the method. This is where you apply it to your own company.

The five conditions of a commercial engine can be looked at plainly, and what follows turns each of them into five questions. It is meant to be answered honestly and quickly, in a single sitting, by someone who actually knows how the company sells. Twenty-five questions. Rate each from 1, meaning not true, to 5, meaning fully true. The goal is not a high score. It is an accurate one. An assessment graded gently is worth nothing, and the most valuable result is the uncomfortable one, because it is the only one that tells a company what to build first. The version here is for reading with a pen. The same assessment can be taken online, and scored for you, at gain.fyi/assessment.

SCAN FOR THE ONLINE VERSION

THE SCALE **1** - not true · **5** - fully true. Rate each statement from 1 to 5. Add each dimension's five answers for a score out of 25.

ONE. Commercial Truth

Whether the company knows, on evidence, who actually buys and why.

1 · NOT TRUE FULLY TRUE · 5

01	We can name the specific person who controls the budget for what we sell, not only the person who uses it or admires it.	1	2	3	4	5
02	We can state, in the buyer's own words, the pain that opens that budget.	1	2	3	4	5
03	Our belief about why customers buy rests on evidence from real buyers, not on our internal theory of the market.	1	2	3	4	5
04	We have recently tested our assumption about who the buyer is, rather than inherited it from our earliest deals.	1	2	3	4	5
05	If the few people who understand our market best left tomorrow, a new person could learn who to sell to and why from something other than their memory.	1	2	3	4	5

COMMON FAILURE: selling to the beneficiary who enjoys the outcome instead of the buyer who feels the pain and controls the budget.

TWO. Positioning

Whether the promise attracts the right buyer and repels the wrong one.

1 · NOT TRUE — FULLY TRUE · 5

	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
01	Our positioning would not fit ten other companies without changing a word.	1	2	3	4	5
02	Our promise repels the wrong buyer as clearly as it attracts the right one.	1	2	3	4	5
03	A stranger reading our positioning would know immediately who it is for and who it is not for.	1	2	3	4	5
04	We have deliberately chosen who we do not serve, and we hold that line under pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
05	We describe what we do the same way to customers, to investors, and to the board.	1	2	3	4	5

COMMON FAILURE: a promise broad enough to feel safe, which is another way of saying generic enough to be ignored.

THREE. Repeatability

Whether the motion closes deals that do not run through the same few people.

1 · NOT TRUE FULLY TRUE · 5

01	Deals close that do not run through the founder or one indispensable individual.	1	2	3	4	5
02	More than one person can carry a deal from first contact to signature.	1	2	3	4	5
03	New commercial hires reach productivity by following a defined motion, not by shadowing a single star.	1	2	3	4	5
04	We can explain why we win in terms of a process, not a personality.	1	2	3	4	5
05	Our forecast holds when a key person is out, on leave, or gone.	1	2	3	4	5

COMMON FAILURE: mistaking a talented person's results for a system the company owns.

FOUR. Fit

Whether the motion matches how each real buyer actually decides.

1 · NOT TRUE		FULLY TRUE · 5
01	Our sales motion matches how the buyer actually makes this decision, not how we wish they would.	1 2 3 4 5
02	Where we sell to more than one kind of buyer, we have designed a distinct motion for each, rather than forcing one motion onto all of them.	1 2 3 4 5
03	We know the real reasons our deals stall, and they are not filed under timing or budget.	1 2 3 4 5
04	We have identified and removed the specific risks that make our buyer hesitate at the end.	1 2 3 4 5
05	When the market tells us the motion is wrong, we change the motion instead of pushing harder.	1 2 3 4 5

COMMON FAILURE: treating a stall as a timing objection and following up, instead of finding the risk hiding underneath it.

FIVE. Adaptability

Whether the company keeps learning, and whether that learning belongs to the organization.

1 · NOT TRUE		FULLY TRUE · 5
01	We change our commercial playbook because the market moved, not because a crisis finally forced us to.	1 2 3 4 5
02	What our best people know about winning lives in the organization, not only in their heads.	1 2 3 4 5
03	When someone learns something important in the market, it becomes something the whole company can use.	1 2 3 4 5
04	We revise the motion on evidence, and we hold it firmly enough to actually test it. Pencil, not Sharpie.	1 2 3 4 5
05	The company would keep improving commercially even if the people who built the system left.	1 2 3 4 5

> COMMON FAILURE: documenting the steps and believing the judgment transferred with them.

SCORING

Reading the result

Add each dimension's five answers for a score out of 25.

20 to 25, **Built.** The condition holds and would survive a test.

14 to 19, **Forming.** It is real but not yet dependable. It works when the right people are in the room.

8 to 13, **Assumed.** The company believes this is true but has not established it on evidence.

5 to 7, **Absent.** The condition does not yet exist. It is being run on hope, or on a few people.

The total, out of 125, is worth less than the shape. A company does not fail commercially because its average was low. It fails at the weakest condition highest in the order.

WHAT NEXT

What to build first

Do not simply repair the lowest score. Read the five in sequence, because the sequence is not negotiable. Commercial Truth comes before Positioning, Positioning before Repeatability and Fit, and Adaptability runs underneath all of them. The first priority is the first condition, from the top, that scores below Built.

A weak condition high in the order quietly caps every condition beneath it. A strong, repeatable motion built on an Assumed Commercial Truth is not a strength. It is a faster way to the wrong place. Fix the highest weakness first, then the next, and let the conditions beneath it improve on a foundation that can finally hold them.

That is the whole discipline, turned back on the company running it. Not whether readiness matters. Where you stand, and what to build next.

You cannot hire your way out of a commercial engine you have not built.