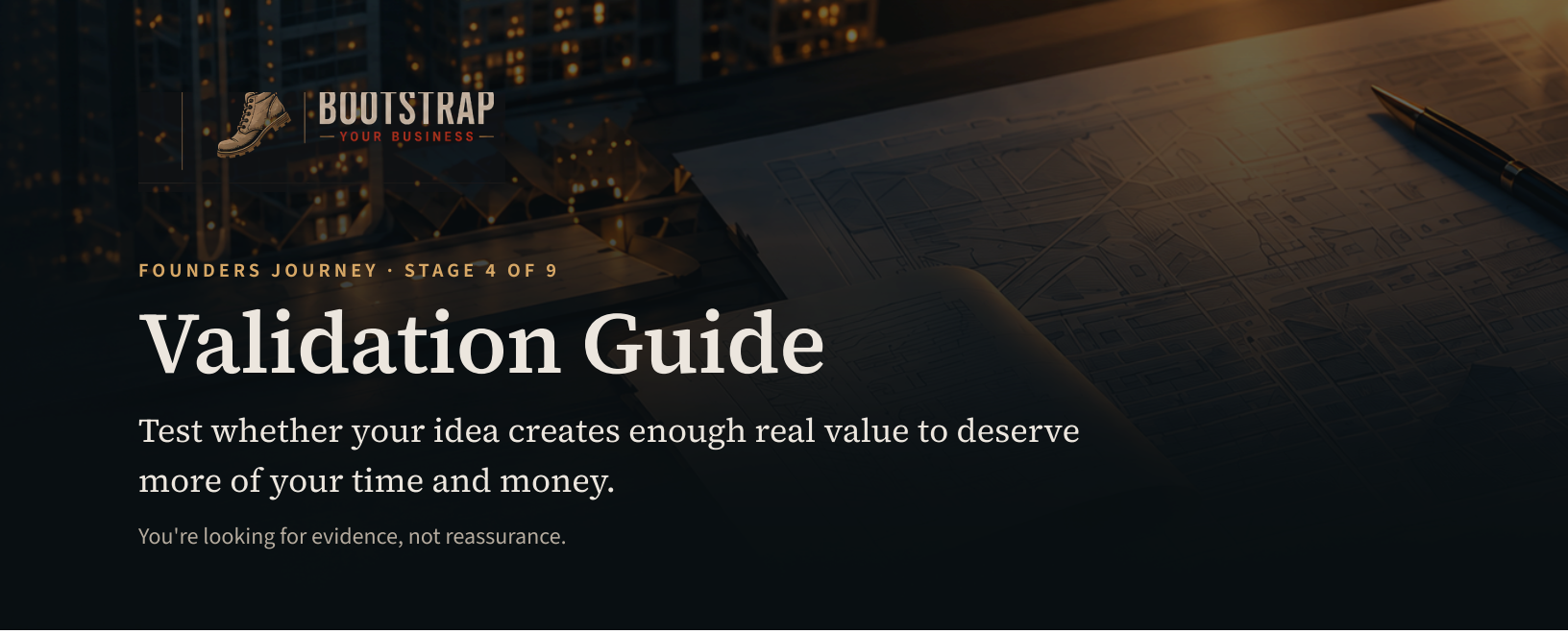


BOOTSTRAP
— YOUR BUSINESS —

FOUNDERS JOURNEY · STAGE 4 OF 9

# Validation Guide

Test whether your idea creates enough real value to deserve more of your time and money.

You're looking for evidence, not reassurance.

Validation is where your idea meets the real world. The goal isn't to prove the business will succeed. It's to learn whether your solution makes enough of a difference for the right people to justify the next step.

| WHAT MATTERS NOW | YOUR FIRST STEP | WHAT COMES NEXT |
|---|---|---|
| What people actually do, what changes for them, and which of your guesses turn out wrong. | Pick your most important guess and run the smallest real test that could prove it wrong. | Foundation: putting the basic business structure in place, once the evidence says it's worth it. |

**WHAT YOU'LL HAVE BY THE END**

- Proof of how real people respond to your solution, not just what they say about it.
- A clear view of which guesses held up, which got weaker, and which changed.
- A decision: test again, change course, pause, stop, or get ready for Foundation.

## 01 Test the guess that matters most

*Every idea rests on things you don't know yet. Validation makes one of them easier to see.*

Does the customer care enough? Does the change matter to them? Does your way of delivering it work? You can't answer all of these at once, so start with the one that would sink the idea if you're wrong.

**COMMON GUESSES TO TEST**

| | |
|---|---|
| **The problem** | It matters enough that the customer wants it fixed. |
| **The change** | Your solution makes a real difference for them. |
| **Your approach** | The way you deliver it is clear and works. |
| **Their commitment** | They'll give time, effort, money, or change a habit to get it. |

**The question to ask**

Not “How can I prove this is good?” but “What do I need to learn before this deserves more of my time and money?”

## 02 Learn from what people do

*Validation isn't a popularity contest. Compliments are nice; behavior is proof.*

Watch what people actually do when they can try it, use it, compare it, come back, or pay for it. Keep each test small enough that being wrong is cheap.

SMALL TESTS CAN LOOK LIKE

- Doing the service by hand before building software.
- A simple mockup that lets someone try the key part.
- A small trial with one or a few customers.
- A limited offer, to see who takes the next step.
- Your way side by side with what people use today.

SIGNS THAT STRENGTHEN THE CASE

- People get the value without a long explanation.
- They use it the way you expected.
- The difference you promised actually happens.
- They make a real commitment, like time or money.
- The same results start to repeat.

SIGNS TO SLOW DOWN

- People like it but don't take the next step.
- It only makes sense after a lot of explaining.
- It only works after adding many extras.
- The keenest people aren't who you expected.
- What they use today is good enough for most.
- You keep changing the test to protect the idea.

**Bad news is still good value**

A test that changes your direction can save far more time and money than one that just makes you feel confident.

## 03 Choose your first step

*Turn your biggest unknown into one small, clear test.*

Decide what you'll watch for before you run the test, so you aren't tempted to explain the result away afterward.

SIGNS YOU'RE MAKING PROGRESS

- You can name the guess each test is checking.
- You're learning from what people do, not only what they say.
- Your solution got simpler or clearer because of what you learned.
- You know what the next small test or decision should be.

A GOOD FIRST STEP HAS FOUR PARTS

| | |
|---|---|
| **Question** | What important unknown are you trying to answer? |
| **Test** | What small real-world action will show you? |
| **Evidence** | What behavior or result will you look for? |
| **Decision** | What would make you continue, change, test again, pause, or stop? |

DO IT FOR LESS

## Start free. Pay only at the wall.

Validation can cost almost nothing. Test by hand before you build or buy anything.

- Talk to people for free: friends of friends, local groups, online communities where your customers already gather.
- Make a mockup with free tools: a free Canva plan, a free form, or a one-page site on a free plan.
- Deliver the first few by hand instead of building software or paying for automation.
- Take payment with a simple payment link (no monthly fee) before you set up a store.

Pay for a tool only when the free version keeps stopping a test you need to run. Then move up one plan, not three.

DO IT WITH AI

## Let AI do the heavy lifting

Copy these into any free AI tool, like ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini. Fill in the brackets first.

**Find your riskiest guess**

*My idea is* [your idea]*, for* [who it's for]*. List the three guesses my idea depends on most, and tell me which one would hurt most if I'm wrong.*

**Design a tiny test**

*Help me design the smallest, cheapest test I could run this week to check this guess:* [your guess]*. Tell me what to watch for, and what result would mean I'm wrong.*

**Read the results honestly**

*Here's what happened in my test:* [your notes]*. Separate what people did from what they said. Then tell me, honestly, whether this supports my idea, weakens it, or is unclear.*

Check the answer: AI can't talk to your customers for you. Use it to plan and make sense of tests, then go get the real evidence yourself.

NOT YET

## What can wait

- Spending on ads or sales before you know the core value.
- Building the full product or every feature.
- Hiring help for demand that hasn't shown up yet.
- Automating something that still changes after every test.
- Treating one good test as permanent proof.
- Pushing ahead only because you've already spent time or money.

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COMING UP

## Foundation

Foundation is where you put the basic business structure in place: what you need to operate responsibly and serve real customers. You move forward not because every test was positive, but because the evidence gives you a good reason to make the business more real.

*Validation isn't about removing all doubt. It's about learning enough to know whether the next commitment is worth it.*