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Time doesn't forgive anymore

*35 years of entrepreneurship, 2 years of AI:
the rules have changed*

A guide for startups, executives, and anyone
launching a new product or service.

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01

Three weeks or nothing

Why speed has become the only strategy that matters

Whether you're launching your first company or running an established group for thirty years, the rule is the same: what doesn't ship fast never ships at all. In the age of AI, this rule is no longer advice — it's a matter of survival.

Most entrepreneurs make the same mistake. They spend six months building something perfect before showing it to anyone. Six months polishing features no one will use. Six months guessing what the customer wants instead of asking them.

I've made that mistake. More than once.

But this mistake is no longer limited to startups. I see it today in companies of fifty, a hundred, five hundred people. Steering committees. Cascading approvals. Eighty-page specifications. And while they plan, a competitor they never saw coming delivers in two weeks what they take a year to specify.

That competitor, tomorrow, will be a single entrepreneur with an AI and an internet connection.

02

The wall ahead

Artificial intelligence doesn't replace companies. It gives anyone the means to do in hours what used to take months. What took six months now takes two weeks. A single developer can build a functional product in a weekend. A team of three can launch a complete service in a month. No office, no fundraising, no permission.

For an established company, this is an existential threat — but only if it keeps operating the way it always has. Slow structures will be outpaced by lean ones. Not because they're less competent, but because they're too slow to react.

Flexibility and speed are no longer competitive advantages. They are survival conditions.

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

90%

of startups fail

70%of leaders prioritize
agility**32%**have an agile digital
strategy**74%**

can't keep up with AI skills

Sources: Deloitte 2026 | Digital Silk 2026 | IDC 2026 | Josh Bersin Company 2026

03

Deliver less, but deliver right

When I took over Clarilog from the commercial court, the software already existed. It was imperfect, full of flaws, but it worked. And more importantly, people were using it. That was the only thing that mattered. If I had waited to make it perfect before reselling it, I'd still be waiting.

"Deliver 1% of the final vision, but 80% of the core value."

Your first deliverable — whether it's a new service, an internal tool, or a commercial overhaul — is not a demonstration of your ambition. It's a test. Is someone willing to use it? Does it solve a real problem? If the answer is no, better to know in two weeks than in six months.

42% of startup failures are attributed to a lack of real market need. That number should haunt every entrepreneur and every executive who launches a new project without first confronting it with reality.

FIELD CASE

A founder observes that 80% of workers don't sit at a desk — yet every tool is designed for headquarters. Instead of building a full platform, he focuses on a single process. Not because it's glamorous, but because it meets three conditions: it happens frequently, it directly impacts revenue, and someone in the organization is accountable for it. Result: a first client who says « I want this in all my stores ».

An entrepreneur is someone who turns ideas into invoices... paid ones.

04

The trap of the polished prototype

There's a natural temptation to present something beautiful. A polished prototype, refined mockups, a flawless presentation. The problem is that a prototype is not a product. People react politely to a mockup. They react honestly to a tool they actually have to use.

Imagine someone trying to hammer a nail with a rock. You immediately see the solution: a hammer. But you can't give them the perfect hammer today. You don't yet know what weight, what handle length, what material will work best. So you give them a stick with a rock tied to the end. It's crude, but it's better than the rock alone. And most importantly, they'll tell you: Heavier. Longer. Sturdier. That's when you start building the real product.

Large companies fall into the same trap. They launch six-month pilot projects with fifty-slide PowerPoints. By the time the pilot is ready, the need has changed. The stick with a rock would have provided more insight in one week than the pilot in six months.

In 1994, when I became one of the first internet providers in Belgium, no one expected a perfect service. People wanted to connect. The service was rudimentary, the speeds were laughable, but the value was there. Those who waited to offer a perfect service arrived too late.

05

This applies to everyone

This logic isn't just for tech startups. It applies to every executive launching a new service, entering a new market, digitizing a process, or trying to differentiate.

A law firm wanting to offer an online advisory service doesn't need a full platform. It needs a web page and a contact form. If the requests come in, the platform will follow. If they don't, they'll have saved six months and fifty thousand euros.

A manufacturer wanting to test a new distribution channel doesn't need to restructure their logistics. They need ten first customers who place orders. The rest follows.

"The question is never: is it ready? The question is: is it enough to learn from?"

– Jean-Paul Rosette

When I took FleXos public on Euronext, every phase had to be executed within tight deadlines, under pressure from regulators, investors, and the market. Perfection was not an option — precision and speed were. That discipline is what made the IPO happen.

Companies that iterate based on user feedback within 30 days of launch are 3 times more likely to achieve product-market fit. This applies to a two-person startup as much as to a two-thousand-person corporation.

FIELD CASE

Facing a massive market, a founder makes the opposite choice from most entrepreneurs: instead of expanding, he narrows down. With every sales conversation, he refines his target, his messaging, his positioning. He ends up focusing on a single segment — where operational complexity is highest and where every execution mistake costs revenue.

The more precise the target, the easier it is to sell. The easier it is to sell, the more your customers become your best sales argument.

06

Speed as a discipline

In a large company, speed is a luxury. In a startup, it's an absolute necessity. But in the age of AI, it has become a necessity for everyone.

I've seen brilliant entrepreneurs fail because they spent a year developing a product nobody wanted. The market had moved while they were coding. Their solution no longer matched the problem.

I've seen established companies lose market share to competitors that didn't exist a year earlier. Not because the competitor was better. Because they were faster.

The rule I apply:

If your first deliverable can't be in a user's hands within a few weeks, you're overbuilding.

Detailed twelve-month plans are a comfortable fiction. No one can predict what will happen in three months, let alone a year. What works is thinking in short cycles.

Set a goal for the next three months. Break it into weekly milestones. Every Friday, review what was done, what didn't work, and adjust for the following week. That's it.

This discipline of short rhythm is what separates companies that move forward from those that plan. I've led companies in software, luxury, armored automotive, and corporate turnarounds — the principle is always the same. Rapid, disciplined execution beats perfect strategy every time.

07

Listen to the field, not the committees

Your early users are invaluable. But you need to know what to listen to. People can describe their problems with remarkable precision. However, they're generally bad at imagining solutions. That's your job.

When someone says "I'd like a button here that does this," don't take the request literally. Look for the problem behind the request. Why do they need that button? What obstacle are they hitting? That's where the real insight lies.

And beware of indifference far more than criticism. A user who complains sees potential in your product. A user who says nothing simply doesn't care. This is true for software, but equally true for a service, a commercial offer, or an internal reorganization.

When I designed and built armored limousines for heads of state with Carat Duchatelet, every vehicle was a prototype. Every client had specific requirements — armor level, interior layout, diplomatic constraints. No standard specification sheet. You had to listen, understand the real need behind the stated request, and deliver. Fast. Because security doesn't wait.

FIELD CASE

Before writing a single line of code, a founder spends weeks shadowing field managers in their daily work. What he finds isn't inefficiency — it's chaos. Hundreds of emails from headquarters. Constant staff turnover. Fragmented tools. Processes that simply don't scale. In one case, sales reports were still being sent by fax.

« When you're inside the system, you don't see how broken it is. From the outside, it's obvious. » No executive committee would have told him that. He had to go and see.

08

Knowing when to pivot

There comes a moment when the signals are clear: what you're building isn't working as planned. The problem is real, but your solution isn't right. Or your solution is good, but the way you're selling it isn't.

Pivoting is not failure. It's a strategic decision.

I bought three companies from the commercial court and successfully restructured all of them. Each time, the pivot was total: new model, new approach, sometimes new team. What remained constant was the conviction that there was value somewhere — it just needed to be found.

Clarilog was acquired from the court for a modest sum. Restructured. Repositioned. And sold at 40 times the purchase price. That wasn't luck. It was the ability to see value where others saw only problems, and to act fast before that value disappeared.

Experienced entrepreneurs succeed at 30%, compared to 18% for first-timers. The difference isn't talent. It's the ability to pivot faster, because you've already seen the signals.

The courage to pivot is often what separates those who succeed from those who hold on too long to a dead idea. In a large corporation, they call it restructuring. The principle is identical.

FIELD CASE

There is one constant tension behind every entrepreneurial journey. You need persistence to push through uncertainty. But too much persistence becomes stubbornness — and keeps you going in the wrong direction.

« You need to keep going — but not in the wrong direction. » The real skill isn't holding on. It's knowing when to adjust. First, open debate. Then, once the decision is made, ruthless execution.

09

What AI really changes

AI doesn't change the fundamental principles of business. It compresses time. What took six months now takes two weeks. What took a month happens in two days.

This means the cost of inaction has exploded. Every month spent thinking instead of acting is a month handed to a competitor who has already shipped, tested, and corrected.

THE ACCELERATION IN NUMBERS

86%

are increasing their AI budget in 2026

57%

are fast-tracking AI adoption

66%

report productivity gains

2 wks

instead of 6 months for an MVP

Sources: NVIDIA 2026 | BDO 2026 | Deloitte 2026 | GainHQ 2026

Gartner predicts that generative AI and AI agents will create the first real challenge to mainstream productivity tools in 35 years, triggering a \$58 billion market shakeup.

But AI doesn't just compress development time. It redistributes economic power. An individual with the right tools can now compete with a team of twenty. An agile SME can outperform a large group. Size is no longer a protection — speed of adaptation is.

The companies that will survive this decade won't necessarily be the biggest or the best-funded. They'll be the ones that learned to deliver fast, listen fast, and correct fast.

FIELD CASE

After finding traction in Europe, a founder decides to expand to the US. But almost nothing transfers. No brand, no references, no network. Decision: start from zero again. Small team, narrow target, direct approach. The product doesn't change. Everything else does — from messaging to pricing to the sales process.

« Just because it works here doesn't mean it works there. » In the age of AI, the speed of adaptation matters more than the size of the organization.

10

Key takeaways

Ship fast. Ship something real, not a cardboard prototype. Listen to the field more than your own convictions. Plan by weeks, not quarters. And when the signals tell you to change direction, change direction.

The perfect product doesn't exist at the start. It's built through dialogue with those who use it. Your only job is to create the conditions for that dialogue as quickly as possible.

This applies to a two-person startup. This applies to a two-thousand-person company. And at a time when AI is reshuffling the deck, it has never been more urgent.

The 7 principles

1. What doesn't ship in two weeks will never ship.
2. Deliver 1% of the vision, but 80% of the value.
3. A real product beats a polished prototype every time.
4. Plan by weeks, not quarters.
5. Listen to problems, not suggested solutions.
6. Indifference is worse than criticism.
7. Pivoting is not failing — it's learning faster.

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Jean-Paul Rosette has been an entrepreneur since 1991. A pioneer of the internet in Belgium (1994), he has created, led, and restructured companies in software, luxury, armored automotive, and international consulting. He acquired three companies from commercial courts and successfully turned them around, including Clarilog (resold at 40x the purchase price). He took FlexOs public on Euronext Brussels. With Carat Duchatelet, he designed and built armored limousines for over 40 heads of state. Today, he works as an international consultant for companies, public administrations, and governments on matters of creation, growth, restructuring, and digital transformation. He is the author of "Straight to the Soul: 9 Essential Lessons" (Amazon, 2025).

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