

## The Weekend Newsletter #2

*Hi, I'm Cristin. I'm a startup advisor and design coach with [The Weekend](#). I've been in UX, marketing and branding design for over 15 years at startups including Zulily, Darby, and New Engen. Now, I apply my design expertise and passion for people and products in Data & AI at Microsoft.*

**This is your sign to stop staring at that blank canvas and get started on your company.**

These tools and techniques can propel you into action.



*Cristin Ford*



Founding a startup is an act of creation and bravery. As an artist at heart, I've always admired the people who take that leap. It's not uncommon for artists to stare at a blank canvas, hoping for inspiration. Like an artist, a founder wades through ambiguity, trying to create something from nothing. That trepidation can transform into paralysis, but delaying until the right idea strikes won't get you anywhere. To start learning and building, you need to start. You will make mistakes and get it wrong, and that is part of the process.

Companies like IDEO, Google and Apple all use a methodology called [Design Thinking](#) as a powerful mindset and toolbox to develop strategies and products. You can do the same, using design thinking to start putting paint to canvas. By getting your idea out of your head and into real life, you can fast-track your thought process, rule out dead ends, and shape your company's direction. It's a low-stakes process, so start learning, prototyping and iterating now.

Here are some practical Design Thinking steps you can take – there's no need to hire a team or find funding. No matter where you are in your journey as a founder, these low-bar methods and processes will get you into "fail fast" mode to launch your growth.

## Define the problem:

- Write a design problem statement or hypothesis – what problem are you trying to solve, and why?
- Create a map of your customer's journey, from the time they discover your company to the moment they experience its value.
- Leverage frameworks like [IDEO's Design Kit](#) and [Google's Design Sprint](#). IDEO's [Frame Your Design Challenge](#) and [Impact Ladder](#) are particularly useful tools.

# A clearly defined problem is the first step towards building a trailblazing solution.

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## Refine the question:

- Craft a target persona and create point-of-view statements to generate insights.
- Research, read and talk with people. Reach out to experts who might have insight into your space. Be bold about asking questions.
- Use [assumption testing](#), [mind mapping](#) or the [five whys](#) technique to dig into the root cause of your question and generate new ways to frame it.

## Leverage what you've learned to revise, revise, revise.

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## Spark new ideas:

- Brainstorm with others to uncover new concepts and insights. By now, you should be questioning a lot about your initial idea. That's fuel for the fire.
- List all the products or services that might meet the needs you uncovered, and use open-source resources to inspire new directions: [Crazy 8s](#) is a good one.
- Don't hesitate to think big and voice wild ideas, even if they seem impractical. Now is the time to take risks.

## Embrace the rough drafts. Every iteration brings you closer to your goal.

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## Create low-pressure prototypes:

- Start [low-fidelity](#). As a designer, I always begin with quick, low-lift methods: organizing content in a Word outline and using pencil and paper to draft flows and layouts.
- Learn as you go. For starters, every founder should watch [this video](#) on rapid prototyping.

## Try to fail fast: start making things and test, refine and adapt as you go.

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### Experiment and iterate:

- Create test profiles on social media to test out your value prop.
- Before you get into coding solutions, try creating a "coming soon" landing page and driving low-cost social media ads to gauge interest with email signups.
- As you discover interesting potential paths, look for easy ways to test market interest. Sites like Wix, Squarespace, and Shopify allow you to create websites free, fast.

## Throughout it all, keep talking with your target customers and building on what you learn.

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### Embrace the uncertainty

Andy Warhol said, "Don't think about making art; just get it done. Let everyone else decide if it's good or bad, whether they love it or hate it. While they are deciding, make even more art." The same applies to any act of creation, including founding your company.

As you approach this process, nurture the sense of being an audacious inventor. You're not tied down by previous roles or your perceptions of your own expertise. Whether you think of yourself as an artist, a maker or a founder, your job is to get started. The sooner you begin, the sooner you can create something transformative.

Forward to a founder 

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