THE STARTING YARD

An Operator's Guide to the Startup World

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MYSTARTERCIRCLE

SAMPLE READ: FREE PREVIEW

Chapters 1 opening • Preface • How to Use This Book

Dedicated to my Dad, whom I lost in 2025.

It made me realise one thing: that life is uncertain.

This is an attempt to work as a wake-up call for every professional who has looked at their salary slip, their calendar, and their ceiling and felt, quietly, that there must be something more.

Build it.

A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

This book started as a conversation I could not stop having.

Not a planned conversation, not a workshop, not a LinkedIn post, not a structured interview. The kind that begins in a Starbucks when you are trying to write and end up listening instead. The kind where you hear something that makes you put down your coffee and reach for a notebook.

I was sitting in a coffee shop one afternoon, working on early drafts of what would eventually become this book, when I overheard two separate conversations happening almost simultaneously at the tables next to me.

Table One.

A man in his late fifties. White at his temples, careful posture, the kind of quiet dignity that comes from decades of showing up. He had lost his job; that much was clear within the first two minutes. Not recently. Two years ago. His children were at the age where college fees were not a future expense but a present crisis.

Across from him sat a younger man in a crisp shirt, laptop open, tone smooth as a sales deck.

> ***"The world has changed, sir. You cannot depend on a salary anymore. You need to build income streams. But to live comfortably, to give your children the future they deserve, you need at least fifty crores in assets. That is the new minimum for a secure life."***

Fifty crores. Delivered without flinching, to a man who had spent two years looking for work.

I stopped hearing the words. I started watching the man's face. He was nodding. Slowly. The way people nod when they are too tired to push back, and too desperate to walk away. He was not being guided. He was being hunted.

Table Two.

A few feet away, a different conversation. A younger man this time, a small business owner, the kind who had probably built something real with his hands and his savings and five years of stubborn effort.

> ***"The business landscape is changing faster than most people realise. What worked five years ago will not survive the next three. Your competitors are already ahead. Your customers are already moving. And honestly, and I say this with respect, you may not have the tools to keep up with this shift on your own."***

The small business owner leaned forward. He was listening the way people listen when someone has successfully made them afraid.

Two tables. Two completely different people. Two completely different circumstances. One script.

Both of these conversations were real. I documented them. I have not dramatised them or changed their substance in any way.

The man at Table One did not need a fifty-crore target and a stock market course. He needed someone to help him identify what twenty-eight years of professional experience could become in the open market.

The man at Table Two did not need to be frightened into a course. He needed frameworks, not fear. Tools, not a threat.

> **■ THE REAL DANGER**
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> The real danger in India's new economy is not just job loss, automation, or market disruption. It is the industry that has grown up around fear, that profits most when you believe you are not enough, do not know enough, and cannot move forward without paying someone to tell you how. You are enough. Your experience is enough. What you need is not someone selling you safety. What you need is a plan to build it yourself.

Your professional life is not the obstacle between you and building something. It is the raw material for it.

A few people deserve to be named. To everyone who let me into their story: the founders, the professionals in transition, the people sitting in rooms I was lucky enough to be in.thank you for trusting me with the unpolished version.

And to Vikram, who is not a real person but is built from real ones, I hope you recognise yourself somewhere in these pages. More importantly, I hope you recognise that the story is not over.

The Starting Yard is not a place you arrive at. It is where the real work begins.

Navin Prajapati, Mumbai, 2026

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be used, not just read. It is built around three recurring elements that appear in every chapter.

■ THE FOUNDER'S LENS

A callout box that appears at key moments in each chapter. It does not add new information; it redirects your attention to the thing you are most likely to skip past. If a framework has just been explained, the Founder's Lens asks you to apply it to yourself, right now. Read these slowly.

✍ BEFORE YOU TURN THIS PAGE

The closing prompt at the end of every chapter. Three questions. They are not rhetorical. They are not optional. They are the difference between reading a book about building and actually beginning to build. Write the answers down: in the margins, in a notebook, in your phone's notes app. The answers you write in Chapter 3 will be relevant again in Chapter 8. The work compounds.

■ VIKRAM

A composite character whose story runs through the entire book. He is not a success story. He is not an inspiration poster. He is a reconstruction of the kind of professional this book was written for: experienced, capable, suddenly unmoored, and trying to figure out what comes next. Follow him. By Chapter 18, you will know what happened to him.

This book has eighteen chapters. Each chapter builds on the one before it. The frameworks in Chapter 7 assume you have done the work in Chapter 5. The validation in Chapter 6 only means something if you have completed the idea stress test in Chapter 5.

The Starting Yard rewards the founder who builds from the ground up.

PART ONE: THE GROUND

CHAPTER 1

The Myth of "Set for Life"

Why Now Is the Time to Build What's Yours

"Koi MNC join karlo, phir life set ho jayegi, growth, job security, aur stability sab mil jayegi."

(Translation: Join a multinational company, and your life is sorted: growth, job security, and stability, all wrapped in one safe package.)

If you grew up in an Indian middle-class home, you've heard this sentence more times than you've heard your own name. It was not advice; it was doctrine. It was woven into the culture of dinner table conversations, used as a shield against uncertainty, and passed down like a family heirloom.

> **■ THE VOICE WE ALL HEARD**
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> "Beta, pehle ek achi company join kar lo. Phir life apne aap set ho jayegi." If you are between 28 and 50, working in India today, you did not just hear this once. You heard it at every family dinner, every relative's wedding, every school reunion. It was not advice. It was a verdict. This chapter is about what happened to that verdict, and what you must do now that it no longer holds.

This philosophy was not just a passing suggestion; it was the unshakable doctrine of countless Indian middle-class households. It was my father's battle mantra, oft repeated like a religious incantation at dinner tables, whispered in drawing rooms, and stitched into the very fabric of career decision-making for millions. For years, and for many decades, this formula worked.

But there is an ancient saying: "Nothing is permanent except change." Today, that adage is not a gentle reminder but a thundering reality. Once-reliable assumptions about work, wealth, and stability are being upended by forces greater, faster, and broader in their impact than any preceding generation ever witnessed.

The world that created the "set for life" formula no longer exists. Today, this belief is not just outdated; it is dangerous.

End of Certainty

For the previous generation, jobs were agreements of loyalty. You worked hard, and the company took care of you. You stayed long enough, and they rewarded you with promotions, stability, and retirement comfort.

That world ended quietly, without announcement, replaced by a new one where:

- Industries shift overnight
- Technologies replace entire roles
- Layoffs are routine
- Skills expire faster than degrees

> ■ **BY THE NUMBERS: INDIA'S EMPLOYMENT REALITY**
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> ■4.28 lakh crore, estimated value of wages lost to automation in India's formal sector by 2030 (NASSCOM Future of Work Report, 2024) 1 in 3 Indian professionals fear job displacement within 3 years (CMIE Consumer Sentiment Survey, 2024) 43% of current white-collar roles in India have high automation exposure (NITI Aayog AI Report, 2023) Only 1 in 5 displaced workers in India's IT sector found equivalent employment within 12 months (TeamLease Employment Outlook, 2024) This is not a warning about the future. This is a description of the present.

Meet Vikram.

He is 34. MBA from a decent college, eight years in a mid-sized FMCG company, last drawn salary ■18 lakhs per annum. He has a home loan, a car EMI, his daughter's school fees, and ageing parents in Lucknow who rely on his monthly transfer.

On a Tuesday afternoon in March, his manager calls him into a room he has never been invited to before. By Thursday, he is carrying a cardboard box out of a building he thought he would grow old in. He has ■2.3 lakhs in savings. His EMIs alone total ■62,000 a month.

He has 112 days before the money runs out.

Vikram is not a cautionary tale. He is a composite of real people: professionals who did everything right by the old rulebook, only to discover the rulebook had been quietly rewritten. You may know a Vikram. You may, in certain moments of honesty, recognise parts of yourself in him.

This book is written for Vikram. And for every professional who has looked at their bank account, their salary slip, and their calendar, and felt, even briefly, that something needs to change.

Chapter 1 continues with: The Age of Volatility • The Rise and Pitfalls of Side Hustles • Indian Entrepreneurship: Opportunity Meets Reality • The Wolves in the Room • Why There Has Never Been a Better Time to Build

You have just read the opening of The Starting Yard.

The full book contains 18 chapters, 100,000+ words, every framework an Indian professional needs to go from salary-dependent to builder.

✓ 18 chapters across 4 parts: The Ground · The Idea · The Build · The Game

✓ Vikram's complete journey: from 112 days of savings to Rs.72 lakhs ARR

✓ India-native frameworks: TAM/SAM/SOM with rupee examples, CCD/CCPS guide, First 100 Customers Playbook, India Funding Ladder

✓ The Indian Founder's Pressure Stack: the chapter no Western book can write

✓ Tools you can use this week: Validation Sprint, Idea Stress Test, Scale Readiness Checklist, 30-Day Founder Brain Calendar

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