



THE WORK BEFORE THE WORK

Build the point of view
before the role begins.

START WITH THE WORK.

STRATEGY ISN'T A HEAD START.
IT'S A POINT OF VIEW.

DIFFERENT COMPANIES.
DIFFERENT PROBLEMS.
SAME STARTING POINT.

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The Work Before the Work: Series Introduction

Why I Build Before I Begin

Most people approach an opportunity by preparing to talk about what they have done.

I approach it by doing the work.

When I take a company seriously, I don't stop at the job description. I build a point of view.

- Sometimes that takes the form of a white paper.
- Sometimes it's a category assessment.
- Sometimes it's a full product or brand brief.

I treat the opportunity like a product.

That means starting with the consumer, not the company. It means studying the current line, the market, and the community. It means identifying friction before proposing solutions. It means understanding what is working before touching what is not.

The goal is not to prove I have all the answers.

The goal is to understand how close I can get from the outside.



The Work Before the Work

This is the foundation of the series.

The Work Before the Work is how I approach companies, roles, and product problems before day one.

- Each article stands on its own.
- Each one is built around a specific company.
- Each one is an attempt to understand the real problem behind the role before ever stepping inside the organization.

Because in most cases, the real problem is not what is written in the job description.

What These Assessments Actually Do

This is the framework I use to get there.

THE WORK ISN'T SIMPLE. THE APPROACH IS.

A repeatable framework I use to understand the real problem before proposing a path forward.

REAL PROBLEM LIVES HERE

- ✓ PRODUCT
- ✓ CLARITY
- ✓ CONSUMER TRUST
- ✓ STORYTELLING
- ✓ SYSTEM

SOLUTION PATH

- STRATEGY
- ARCHITECTURE
- STORY
- EXPERIENCE
- EXECUTION
- FEEDBACK
- NEXT DECISION

THE FRAMEWORK I USE

- 01 START WITH THE CONSUMER**
Understand needs, motivations, behaviors, and frustrations.
Empathy before assumptions.
- 02 STUDY THE LANDSCAPE**
Analyze the category, market trends, competition, and white space.
Know the context.
- 03 FIND THE REAL SIGNAL**
Identify opportunities, friction points, and untapped potential.
Separate noise from what matters.
- 04 BUILD THE POINT OF VIEW**
Develop a clear point of view rooted in insight, strategy, and system thinking.
Clarity creates options.
- 05 CREATE THE PATH FORWARD**
Outline the strategy, solution, and next decisions.
Purpose before presentation.

THIS ISN'T THEORY. IT'S HOW I THINK. IT'S HOW I BUILD.

DIFFERENT COMPANIES. DIFFERENT PROBLEMS. SAME STARTING POINT.

UNDERSTAND FIRST. THEN BUILD.

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After sharing this work, I always ask some version of the same question:

“How close was this to what you are actually seeing internally?”

The answer is usually high.

Not because I have access to internal information.

Because the signals are already visible if you take the time to study product, consumer behavior, and market feedback together.

Sometimes I am told that parts of the solution are already being discussed.

Sometimes I am told that ideas raised may be implemented later.

That is validating.

But it also raises a fair question:

If the problem was currently visible from within, why had the ideas or solutions I presented not already implemented?

That question is not an accusation.

It is the work.

Most of the time, what looks like a product problem is something else.

THE PROBLEM IS RARELY THE PRODUCT. IT'S THE SYSTEM AROUND IT.

Before proposing solutions, identify the real issue. Get to the root, not the surface.

PROBLEM

PRODUCT CLARITY TRUST SYSTEM

BEHAVIOR → EXPERIENCE → GROWTH

SOLVE THE RIGHT THING. NOT JUST SOMETHING.

DIAGNOSE BEFORE YOU DESIGN

| COMMON SYMPTOMS | POSSIBLE ROOT CAUSES | DIAGNOSE. THEN DECIDE. |
|---|--|--|
| SALES ARE FLAT "We need a new product." | PRODUCT GAPS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wrong features• Misaligned with needs• Weak performance | FIND THE REAL LEVER. MOVE THE NEEDLE. ASK BETTER QUESTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ What is the consumer really trying to get done?✓ What is getting in the way?✓ Where is the drop-off?✓ What do we control?✓ What would make this dramatically better? SOLVE THE RIGHT PROBLEM. EVERYTHING ELSE FOLLOWS. |
| LOW ENGAGEMENT "We need more marketing." | CLARITY ISSUES <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confusing positioning• Too many messages• Hard to understand | |
| HIGH CART ABANDONMENT "We need better conversion." | TRUST DEFICIT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inconsistent experience• Overpromises• Lack of proof | |
| NEGATIVE FEEDBACK "We need to fix the product." | SYSTEM PROBLEMS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fragmented process• Poor handoffs• Wrong incentives | |
| NO CLEAR DIFFERENTIATION "We need a clearer story." | EXPERIENCE GAPS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friction in the journey• Poor service or retail• Unmet expectations | |

INSIGHT IS EASY. DIAGNOSIS IS HARD. THAT'S WHERE IMPACT BEGINS.

OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE. MARKET SIGNAL. CLEARER THINKING. STRONGER DECISIONS.

BETTER DIAGNOSIS. BETTER STRATEGY. BETTER OUTCOMES.



Companies operate within constraints that are not visible externally. Priorities, timelines, budgets, internal alignment, and existing structures.

A strong outside perspective does not replace internal knowledge.

- It stress-tests it.
- It highlights where the signal already exists.

That is why these documents matter.

They are not just applications.

They are work samples.

The Real Problem

In most cases, what looks like a product problem is something else.

- It is a clarity problem.
- A positioning problem.
- A trust problem.
- A system problem.

Product is usually where the issue shows up.

It is rarely where it starts.

That is why improving the product alone does not always fix the outcome.

The leverage is in diagnosing the system behind it.

Most teams try to fix the symptom. The impact comes from fixing the system.

IT'S NOT THE PRODUCT. IT'S THE SYSTEM.
Product fixes treat symptoms. System fixes create *impact*.

PRODUCT-CENTRIC THINKING
Surface Level Solutions
"We need a new product."

SYSTEM-CENTRIC THINKING
Root Cause Solutions
"Let's fix the system that creates the problem."

VS.

PRODUCT
Right solution.
Right purpose.

POSITIONING
Clear value.
Clear differentiation.

PROCESS
Aligned teams.
Effective execution.

STORY
Clear, consistent,
compelling.

EXPERIENCE
Seamless across
every touchpoint.

PERFORMANCE
Measure what matters.
Learn and adapt.

CONSUMER AT THE CENTER

RESULT: TEMPORARY RELIEF
Activity spikes. Problems resurface.
The cycle repeats.

RESULT: SUSTAINABLE GROWTH
Stronger connection. Better performance.
Compounding impact over time.

1. UNDERSTAND
Ask better questions.

2. IDENTIFY
Find the real levers.

3. ALIGN
Connect the right parts.

4. EXECUTE
Move with focus and clarity.

5. IMPACT
Measure results. Drive outcomes.

REAL IMPACT HAPPENS WHEN THE SYSTEM WORKS TOGETHER.



The First Three Assessments

The first set of articles in this series focuses on three different companies and three different types of problems.

Each one required a different lens.

Altra

A road running category assessment focused on simplification and transition management.

The opportunity was not simply more product, but a clearer system that makes the brand easier to understand, enter, and trust.

SOREL

A footwear strategy assessment centered on franchise architecture, design language, and year-round relevance.

The opportunity was not reinvention, but organizing existing strengths into a scalable system.

Vuori

A brand and creative assessment focused on consistency, experience, and creative structure at scale.

The opportunity was not product innovation, but alignment across product, storytelling, retail, and digital.

Different companies.

Different problems.

Same starting point.

Start with the work.



Here's how the first three break down.

THE WORK BEFORE THE WORK | SERIES OVERVIEW

THREE COMPANIES. THREE CHALLENGES. ONE APPROACH.

Different companies. Different problems. Same starting point.

| | | |
|---|---|--|
|  01 ALTRA SIMPLIFICATION + TRANSITION |  02 SOREL FRANCHISE + STRUCTURE |  03 VUORI SYSTEM + CONSISTENCY |
| THE FOCUS Clarify the product system and consumer entry. | THE FOCUS Organize strengths into a scalable franchise system. | THE FOCUS Strengthen creative and experience consistency. |
| THE OPPORTUNITY Make the brand easier to understand, enter, and trust. | THE OPPORTUNITY Create year-round relevance with clear design language. | THE OPPORTUNITY Align product, storytelling, retail, and digital. |
| THE OUTCOME A simplified, connected product line with clear transition. | THE OUTCOME A structured franchise architecture built for growth. | THE OUTCOME A scalable system that elevates the entire brand. |

SAME APPROACH. START WITH THE WORK.

- START WITH THE CONSUMER**
Understand needs and motivations.
- STUDY THE LANDSCAPE**
Analyze category, market, and trends.
- FIND THE SIGNAL**
Identify friction and untapped potential.
- BUILD THE POINT OF VIEW**
Develop insight-driven recommendations.
- CREATE THE PATH FORWARD**
Outline the strategy and next decisions.
- DRIVE IMPACT**
Execute with focus. Measure and evolve.

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The Perspective Behind the Work



I have spent over a decade building independently.

That means owning the entire system end-to-end.

- Product.
- Brand.
- Sourcing.
- Retail.
- Storytelling.
- Margin.
- Consequences.

I also understand why companies value large brand experience.

- It brings scale.
- Structure.
- Process.
- Specialization.



Those are real advantages.

But there are tradeoffs.

Independent experience builds a different perspective:

- End-to-end ownership instead of function-level responsibility.
- Faster decision-making under real constraints.
- A direct connection between product decisions and business outcomes.
- The ability to see how product, brand, and retail actually connect in practice.

It is not one or the other.

Both paths produce strong operators.

This is simply the perspective I bring.

The “Secret Sauce” Question

I am often asked why I am willing to share this level of thinking in a hiring process.

Why give away the “secret sauce”?

I have never believed in gatekeeping information.

As a founder, I have shared what I have learned with other independent builders. Not because everyone will execute the same way, but because stronger businesses make the ecosystem better.

- I can provide the insight.
- The path.
- The instructions.

But there is nuance to everything.

- Execution is the advantage.
- Judgment is the advantage.
- Timing is the advantage.

My father once told me:

“You can teach a person everything they know. Doesn’t mean you teach them everything you know.”

That idea has stayed with me my entire professional life.



On “Overqualification” and Experience

At times, I’ve heard concerns around being “overqualified” or not coming from a large brand background.

In some cases, those concerns are valid. Certain roles do require very specific experience, structure, or scale exposure.

But I’ve learned that “overqualification” is often not the real issue.

The real question is alignment.

Is the candidate aligned with:

- the level of the work
- the pace of the work
- the reality of the role

For me, and for others with similar paths, I don’t rank work by title alone.

- I have led teams.
- Built independently.
- Worked inside structured organizations.
- Operated without infrastructure.
- Built product.
- Worked with factories.
- Opened retail.
- Managed SKUs.
- Told product stories.
- Carried the business consequences when decisions were right or wrong.

That experience can serve an executive role.

It can also serve a role closer to the product calendar.

Neither is better by default.

The question is whether the work is meaningful and whether I can make an impact.



Personally, I prefer to stay close to the work, regardless of title.

Because in many cases, the further removed a role becomes, the further it can move from the consumer.

And for me, the consumer is always the starting point.

In some cases, companies prioritize hiring from larger brands.

That can bring immediate credibility, signal intent to investors, or reinforce a focus on scale.

Those are real advantages.

But it can also raise an important question:

Is the goal to replicate what another brand has already done?

Or to build something that is specific to your company, your product, your consumer, and your culture?

There is no single right answer.

Both approaches can be effective.

This is simply the perspective I bring:

To assess the business as a whole, understand how the system connects, and build from within it, not apply something from the outside.



Why I Do This

I do not build these for every company.

Only for the ones I am serious about.

Because the brief tells the truth.

It tells the company how I think.
It tells me whether I understand the work.

And if I am selected, I do not start at zero.

- I start with context.
- I start with a point of view.
- I start ready to be useful.

That is the work before the work.

**START WITH
THE WORK.**

**UNDERSTAND
THE PROBLEM.**

**BUILD
THE PATH.**

**CREATE
THE IMPACT.**

**CLARITY. STRUCTURE. IMPACT.
THAT'S THE WORK BEFORE THE WORK.**

**DIFFERENT COMPANIES.
DIFFERENT PROBLEMS.
SAME STARTING POINT.** >>> **THIS IS THE STARTING POINT.
NOT THE CONCLUSION.**

“ THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES AREN'T FOUND BY TALKING ABOUT THE WORK. THEY'RE EARNED BY DOING IT FIRST. ”



Closing

This is the starting point.

Not the conclusion.

The next three articles in this series apply this same approach to real companies, real product systems, and real opportunities:

Altra Running a VF Corporation: where clarity and transition define the path forward.

SOREL: where structure and franchise thinking unlock scale.

Vuori: where system alignment becomes the next stage of growth.

Different companies.

Different problems.

Same starting point.

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