BUILT FROM THE COO SEAT. WRITTEN FOR FOUNDER CEOS.

COO BRIEF / FREE

DOC - S1C / 00

You forgot about the People, champ.

A COO briefing for founder CEOs about to scale the wrong thing.

10-200 PEOPLE

SEED - SERIES B-ISH

VINKO GRGIC / SUNSHINE COAST, AUSTRALIA

The company is the people.

01 / THE COLD OPEN

Days away from the round.

You are a startup founder CEO. You feel you have nailed your Pre-Seed to Seed journey. You have a slick product, over $1m ARR, growing customer base, understand your SOM GTM wedge, and have a team of half to a dozen smooth operators, running a flat structure. And you are days away from closing a big round $5m+. You're on top of the world. You've got a slick investor deck you've been showing around town. You have belief, conviction, support etc. And you've said "we will grow to $5m+ ARR inside of 24 mths, we'll 2-3x our head count, etc. etc.". And somewhere vaguely you know you need to bolster your tech, product and marketing ops / team, because you are "product led sales" (or so you think).

You've been so consumed building up this product, getting those customers (and keeping them happy), and you've ground out the revenue growth. And then you spent months warming up investor talks, which you don't enjoy cos you're a "builder" an "entrepreneur" or "hustler".

You know that you need to raise (it's the popular tried and tested VC playbook), you know how much (based purely on perceptions and stage). You're fairly confident it will be enough to hire that team, spend that budget, grow those customers, and get that revenue. Beyond that, the idea of 2-3x your people org, you don't really have time yet to think about when and who you will hire, not even super clear if hiring is the best thing.

PRODUCT. CUSTOMERS. CAPITAL.

01 / BEFORE THE WIRE HITS

THE FOUNDER'S PLAN

You've got this.



"But you'll deal with that when the money lands. A quick holiday, and then bam. The team will keep going, the same way we always did."

So you think...

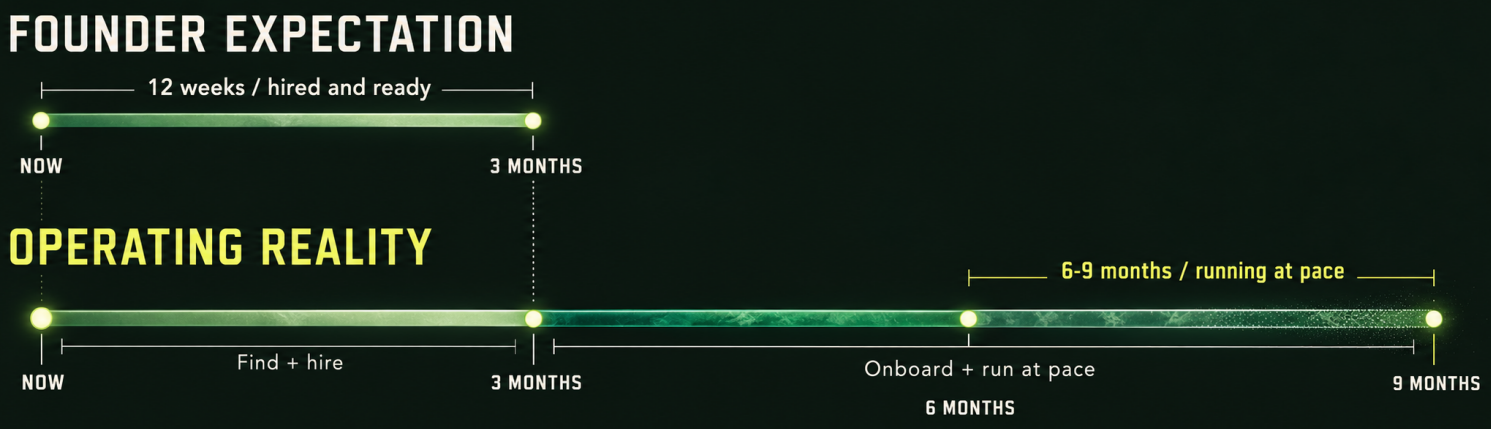
02 / COLD WATER

"Hold up, champ."

Before that deck closes and the wire hits, sit with me a minute.

THE HIRE IS ONLY THE START

How long will it take you to find, onboard, and get up to speed a Head of Product? Twelve weeks you say. Hire and presto. Sure, champ. Twelve weeks if the recruiter is good and the candidate slate is right. Then another three to six months from their day 1 before they are running at pace. Six to nine months from now, minimum, before Product is actually in their hands. What is your plan for Product between now and then?



What is your plan for Product between now and then?

02 / THE QUESTIONS KEEP COMING

QUESTION / 01

You're hiring a CTO, for $250k plus upside, great. How much budget have you set aside for them to grow and equip their team? None you say. Excellent, champ.

QUESTION / 02

Is a CMO hire the right call here, or do you need to increase your design and marketing budget instead? You don't know? Right.

QUESTION / 03

How many people on your Customer Success team is too many before they need a Manager? Who on the current team have you set up to take that role? Are they actually any good at managing humans, or just good at the work? You hadn't thought about the difference?

QUESTION / 04

How do you run your one-on-ones, champ? "I don't, we're a flat org, we're all capable, nobody needs that bureaucracy, besides I hate micro-managing people." Got it. So you manage product, customers, and revenue. Just not the people. Good luck, champ.

02 / WHAT THE COMPANY LEARNS FROM YOU

QUESTION / 05

What behaviour are you currently tolerating on your team that you would not tolerate from a new hire? What does your team watch you do under pressure, and what have they learned from it? That's your culture, champ. The deck is decoration.

QUESTION / 06

How long does it take you to performance-manage out a wrong hire? Have you ever done it? Do your Managers know how, or will you be the one doing it for them?

QUESTION / 07

When was the last time you let a real decision actually be made by someone else - and did not retroactively approve, override, or weigh in? You can't remember? That's the problem.

None of those are trick questions, champ. They are the questions your company is about to ask you, whether you answer them in the next four weeks or in the next four quarters. The first answer is cheap. The second is expensive.

03 / THE DIAGNOSIS

The company is the people.

Here's the thing. Most people think that companies are the assets - the platform, the contract, the IP, the revenue, the capital. I've learned over 15 years leading high performing teams, they are not. A company by definition is a group of people - on a mission.

This is why so many business owners refer to their company incorrectly as "a family". It is not. Here's the flip.

I like to think of it like a sports team (eg. soccer). A group of people, assembled for a common purpose, with a goal in mind.

If it's all fun, and no results. This works for a while. Until people realise mid to late season, that losing sucks. And the fun evaporates. And then the relationships break down. And the trust erodes. And then the toxic behaviour sets it. And people start to blame and resent each other.

03 / PERFORMANCE AND SOUL

Standards. Soul. Sustained winning.

Or maybe it's the other type, all performance and results, no soul. It works, on paper. But people come and go. Relationship dynamics struggle. There are brilliant jerks, and they are celebrated and awarded. And the glue / utility players, they get fed up and either leave, or worse they stay as a shadow of themselves. Again, this works for maybe one or two seasons, maybe more. But eventually, it catches up with them. And the costs to maintain skyrockets. Sooner or later, they aren't leading the ladder. They're not even near the top. And then the money guys come in, and take over. Fire the coach and manager. Rinse and repeat.

The truth is, in an elite, high performance, sustained winning professional sports team (think All Blacks) - it's getting both right. And usually by starting with the culture first. The culture of standards. Of investment in each other. In relationships. In development. A shared mission. And most importantly, a scalable, memorable and repeatable cultural process that sees you lead the pack year, after year, after year. Until you're an institution. Creating legacy.

This is what all highly successful decade plus ventures have in common. Period.

03 / WHAT YOU TELL YOURSELF

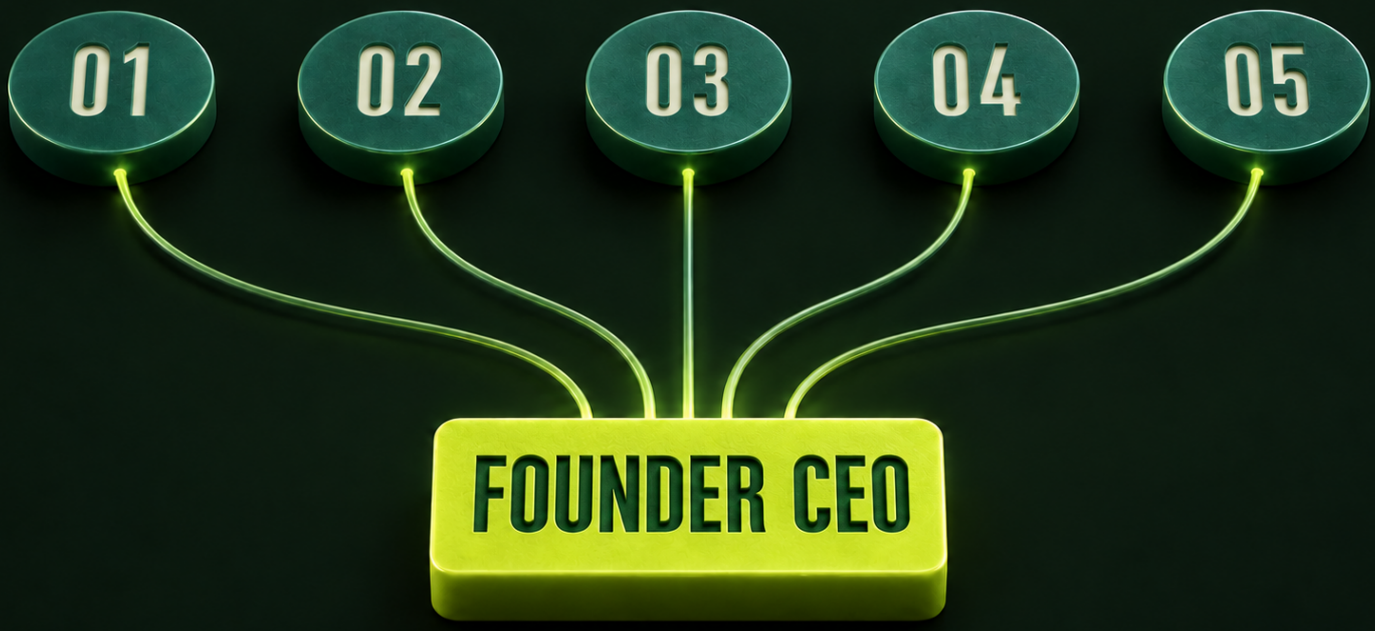
BELIEF / 01

"I'll sort this out later, right now I need to hustle."

THE COO'S READ

Sure, champ. Every decision you take back buys you speed today and leaves someone else waiting for you tomorrow. The people you hired learn to bring the work back to you, because that is how it gets finished. Then the company grows, your calendar fills, and the team is still waiting. What have you actually built that keeps moving when you are not in the room?

THE PATTERN / EVERY DECISION COMES BACK



03 / TWO MORE BELIEFS TO EXAMINE

BELIEF / 02

"I'm a builder. I'm just not good at managing people."

Got it. You learned the product, the market, the fundraising. You made room to get better at those because the company needed you to. Now the people need clear expectations, decisions they can own, and someone who notices when they are struggling. Calling yourself a builder leaves all of that work with somebody else, usually without telling them.

Who do you think is carrying it, champ?

BELIEF / 03

"They're trying hard. I don't want to upset them."

Of course you don't. But while you wait, they keep guessing what good looks like, and somebody else carries the gap. Maybe the target is wrong. Maybe you hired someone into a seat they were never ready for. Maybe their behaviour really does need to change. You cannot tell which while you keep avoiding the conversation.

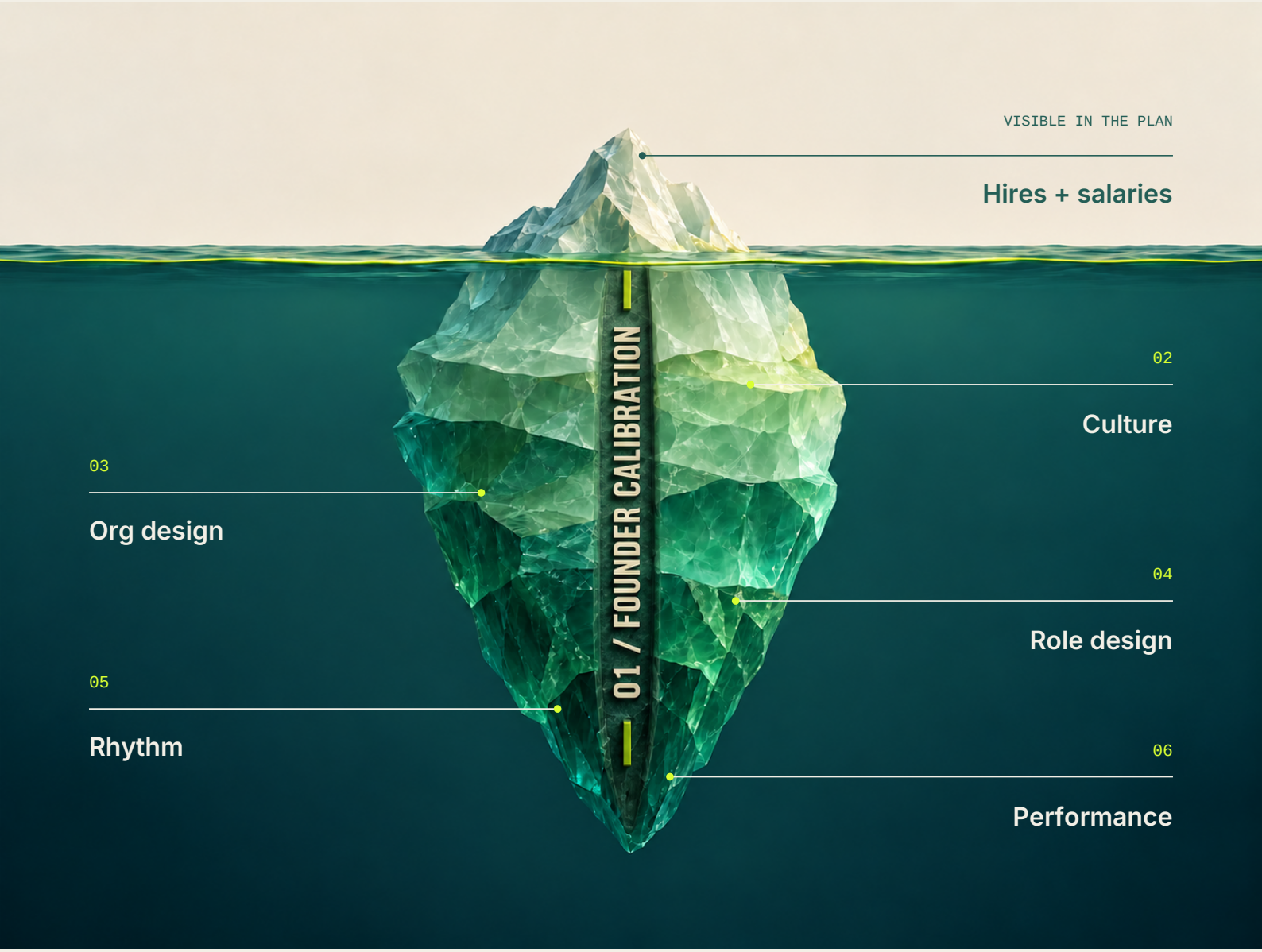
The person deserves to know where they stand while there is still time to do something about it.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS. REAL OWNERSHIP. EARLY CONVERSATIONS.

04 / WHAT THE SLIDE MISSED

You funded the hires.

What happens between the salaries in your model and the milestone in your forecast?



04 / CULTURE AND THE TRANSITION

Your use-of-funds slide has a row for the team. Your forecast has a milestone those people are supposed to deliver. What happens between the two?

People need time to find their feet, context to make decisions, and somebody who can lead the work. You have put their salaries into the model. Where have you allowed for the work of turning those hires into a company that can deliver the plan, champ?

DOC - S1C / 02

Culture as behaviour

The new hire starts learning your culture before their first day. They learn it from how you communicate, what you make time for, and whether your promises hold when something gets awkward. Later, they watch who gets backed, who gets away with things, and what happens when a target is missed. Your values deck can say whatever it likes. The company is already teaching them how to behave.

> ***What will the next 20 people learn from the way you actually run this company?***

04 / MAKE ROOM FOR THE TRANSITION

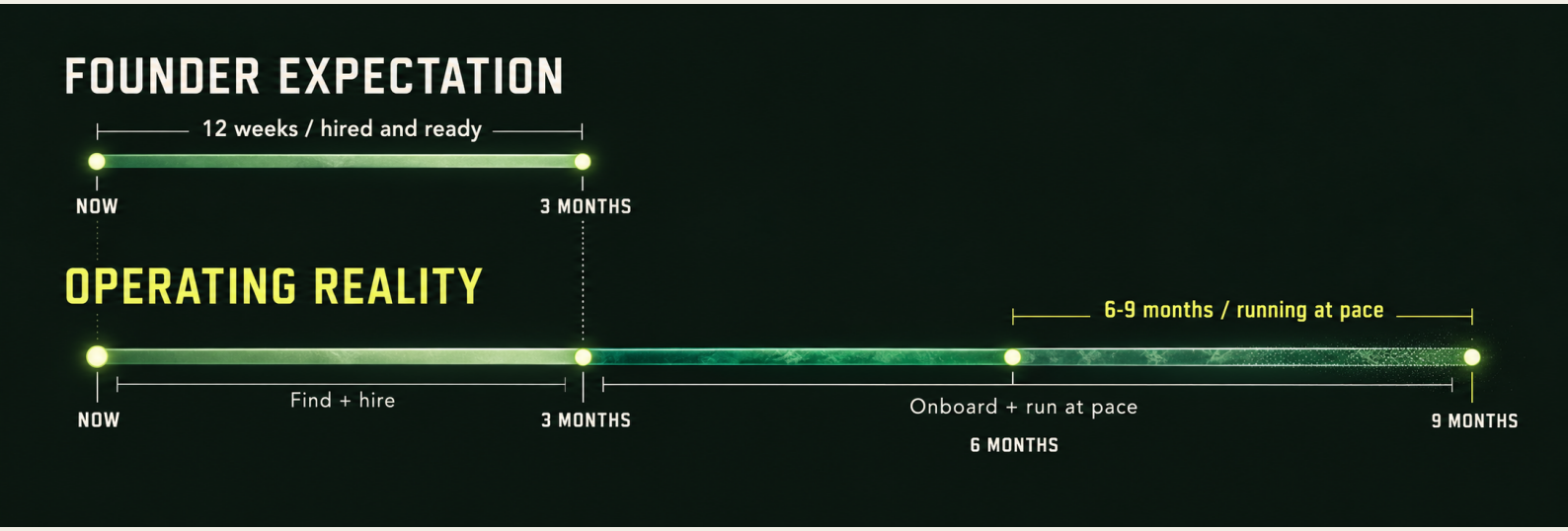
DOC - S1C / 03

Org design before hiring

You've budgeted for a senior hire and put the result they will deliver into the forecast. When do they start? What do they need around them? How long before the function can carry the work you have promised? While they find their feet, someone has to hand over the context, make room for decisions, and carry the gap. That someone may already be carrying the product, the customers and the next round. Who has room for the transition?

> ***What has to be working, and by when, for those hires to deliver the milestone in your forecast?***

THE HIRE IS ONLY THE START



04 / SEATS, RHYTHM AND PERFORMANCE

DOC - S1C / 04

Role design and KPIs

You can hire someone with a great attitude into a role they cannot yet carry. I have done it. The work needed experience I had hoped they could grow into, on a seat that could not absorb the learning curve. Now both of you are trying hard, the work is still missing, and a good person is starting to feel like a bad hire. Before you judge the person, how clearly did you understand what that seat demanded?

Have you defined what success requires, or just written down the work you want off your plate?

DOC - S1C / 05

Company and manager rhythm

Everyone can talk to everyone. Great. Can they also tell what matters this week, who can decide, and what gets displaced when something urgent arrives? As the team grows, fewer people share the context that used to live in a conversation beside your desk. Work starts travelling through side channels and priorities change depending on who asked. The milestone in your deck stays the same while the work underneath it keeps changing. Where will you see the gap early enough to do something about it?

Where do people discover that the plan has changed, and who helps them reconcile it?

04 / PERFORMANCE AND THE PLAN

DOC - S1C / 06

Performance, breakdown and exits

Someone has missed the target again. You feel the conversation getting heavier each time you postpone it. But what are you actually looking at: a stretch number that needs adjusting, a person who needs support, or a pattern of saying the right thing and doing something else? Those are different problems. If the first time you examine them properly is when you are ready to end the relationship, both of you have been guessing for too long.

What do they know about the gap today, and what have you done to understand your part in it?

THE PLAN STILL NEEDS SOMEBODY TO CARRY IT

The money lands. The salaries start. The milestone gets closer. All of this work still needs somebody to carry it. As the founder CEO, you are shaping the conditions your people have to work inside. How much of the plan depends on those conditions taking care of themselves?

05 / ALREADY IN THE THICK OF IT

Now you worry... maybe you've crossed this mark already, and you're thinking it's too late to fix. Good news, it's not!

Maybe the round closed months ago. You hired the people, the calendar filled up, and the team keeps bringing you problems you thought the new hires would solve. You are working harder and have less room to think. Some of what you have just read is already happening.

You still have a company to lead. The people who are here need to know what you expect, what they can own, and what support is real. The decisions you make next will teach them as clearly as the ones that got you here.

Start with an honest view of what the company needs now, including what needs to change in how you lead it. There is work to do, champ. You can still do it.

06 / THE BRIDGE TO THE SYSTEM

See around corners.

As a seasoned COO, it is my duty to help you see around corners. This brief names some of the work ahead. The Startup COO Operating System is built to help you work through it with your team, in a deliberate sequence.

DOC - S1C / 01-06

01 **Founder Calibration**
what changes in how you lead.

02 **Culture as Behaviour**
the standards the company learns from you.

03 **Org Design Before Hiring**
what the company needs before adding people.

04 **Role Design and KPIs**
what each seat needs to succeed.

05 **Company and Manager Rhythm**
how people stay aligned and make decisions.

06 **Performance, Breakdown and Exits**
how you face the gaps early and properly.

06 / YOUR NEXT STEP

Implement things that don't break under pressure.

THE STARTUP COO OPERATING SYSTEM

6	6	$299
MODULES	MONTHS	AUD / ONE-OFF

The planned format is 6 modules over 6 months, with PDF guides and working templates you can use with your team. The planned price is AUD $299, one-off. The full system is in development.

If this sounds like the work your company needs, leave your email and I will let you know when it is ready. If you have a question, chat with me.

Notify me at launch >

Chat with Vinks >

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