Introduction
The Clock is Ticking

1485. Milan, Italy.

Powered flight fascinated Leonardo da Vinci. His "Flying Machine" mimicked a bird's wings in the same way his "Aerial Screw" reimagined a carpenter fastening lumber. They were…interesting concepts, but neither ever flew. Flight wasn't simply an artistic curiosity. We remember Da Vinci for the *Mona Lisa* and the Vitruvian Man, but he earned a healthy portion of his income designing military equipment for his patrons in their never-ending battle for supremacy. He had every incentive to succeed.

Yet for over four hundred years, Da Vinci's ideas yellowed on parchment, grounded. Was he a failure? Was his "product" bad? Was his "go-to-market strategy" flawed? No. Da Vinci was just early. He was trying to engineer an aircraft in a world that hadn't yet invented the internal combustion engine or lightweight aluminum. He was fighting a battle he couldn't win because his true enemy wasn't physics; it was *time*.

1903. Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, USA.

Two humble bicycle mechanics, Orville and Wilbur Wright, achieved what the greatest genius of the Renaissance could not. They didn't have Da Vinci's intellect. They didn't have a *padrone* or the significant government funding that competitors enjoyed. But they had something better: *exquisite timing.* Their flyer took off at the precise historical moment when high-strength bicycle materials collided with the dawn of the gasoline engine. Those precursor technologies enabled them to focus on a revolutionary three-axis flight control system. It's the same yaw, pitch, and roll method aircraft use more than 100 years later. The metaphorical runway was paved. All they needed to do was point into the wind.

1937. Lakehurst, New Jersey, USA.

The Hindenburg airship burns in 32 seconds. In that half-minute, the window for lighter-than-air travel slammed shut, and the window for powered commercial airplanes flew open. It was a perceptual moment when the timeline shifted violently, destroying the fortunes of those who couldn't change and minting the fortunes of those who could.

The Invisible Variable.

I tell you these stories because you are doing exactly what Da Vinci did. You're not paying attention to the two guys in a garage inventing your company's replacement. You're vulnerable to your own Hindenburg moment. Whether you are a startup founder in Silicon Valley, an R&D director at a Fortune 500, or simply a person with a great idea to change the world, you are obsessed with the *what* (your idea) and the *how* (your execution). But *most* new products fail. The odds are stacked against you. When the post-mortem is written, we blame the usual suspects: "The market wasn't ready," or "We ran out of runway." We treat time as an excuse. *I am telling you, timing is the root cause.* We ignore timing because we believe it is out of our control—a fixed constraint we must suffer through. We believe we are bound to the clock.

We are wrong.

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I see innovation failure differently from most business leaders. I am a product veteran with hundreds of product launches to my name, but I am also a historian. Where a CEO sees a quarter, I see a cycle. Where a Product Manager sees a roadmap, I see a trajectory. History teaches us that time is not just a line on a calendar. It is a landscape. It has topography. And just like a landscape, time can be navigated. Most innovators are walking through this landscape blindfolded. They are brilliant, capable, and doomed.

This book is about removing the blindfold. It is about realizing that timing isn't everything. It's not the only thing. But when it comes to innovation, timing is the *first* question we must consider. That's because *change over time* is the only constant that matters.

Let me say that again to emphasize the mindset shift you must feel in your bones: All markets evolve.

However, all our canvases, frameworks, and case studies artificially freeze time to teach us a lesson or illustrate a point. That is where they fail. To ignore time is to mistake the water for its flow. In this book, I'm going to show you three much more actionable and practical ways to think about time:

1. Chronological time: This is probably what you're thinking, and it's a good place to start. We live on a planet that rotates on an axis that orbits a star on a predictable schedule. It's only natural to think about time in terms of clocks and calendars. Although we cannot control our planet's rotation, we must use time strategically. Remember, even the genius of the Renaissance couldn't speed up the clock.
2. Sequential time: This seems natural as well. Some things happen before other things. Summer precedes autumn, which precedes winter. You influence those sequences, but you don't fully control them. The Wright Brothers built on foundational precursor technology, taking the next logical step.
3. Perceptual time: These are the "moments" we create—surprise, joy, fear, and longing. It's when time seems to slow down or speed up. It's the turning point. It's the cultural moment. It's the 32 seconds when the future of commercial air travel was decided. I will teach you to create and control this *most potent* dimension of time.

With just these definitions, you are on your way to developing a timing mindset—a *timeset*. With just that shift in thinking, you can begin to bend time to your advantage: when you launch, when you pivot, and when you stop time for the world to watch what you've done. In the pages that follow, we will use lessons from deep history—as well as modern examples—to dismantle the myths that timing is about luck or that success means simply "moving faster." Speed wouldn't have helped Da Vinci. Speed proved fatal to the Hindenburg. And the Wright Brothers weren't lucky.

It's time to stop following the clock and start manufacturing time.

Your window of time opens.

Now.

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