

The Story

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: This chapter must function as the central case study for everything the book will later argue. It establishes credibility through honest retelling, not through claims of expertise. The story should leave the reader thinking: "If this person didn't know—and stayed—maybe I can stay too."]

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: This chapter must be human, honest, unspectacular. Zero hype, zero branding language, zero premature conclusions. The author's uncertainty and self-doubt are features, not bugs.]

I want to tell you a story. Not because it's remarkable, but because it's real. Not because I figured it out, but because I didn't stop when I realized I hadn't.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Opening maintains humility and uncertainty. "Not because I figured it out" - important qualification that sets the tone. This is pastoral voice - inviting rather than impressive.]

This book is not primarily about AI theory. It's about what happened when I tried to build something real with AI, without knowing how, and refused to stop when it became overwhelming.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: Good setup. The distinction between "AI theory" and "something real" is important. The phrase "refused to stop when it became overwhelming" captures the reality without making it sound heroic.]

The project is called Movemental. It began in early September. And I want to tell you exactly where I was when I started, because I think it matters.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: Specific date ("early September") creates concrete reality. The author's instruction to preserve chronology is important.]

Where I Started

I did not know how to build a database. I did not know backend architecture. I had built a small number of React apps, and one front-end-only app in about a week. That was my experience.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Direct, honest admission. No false modesty, no exaggeration. The author's specific limitations are important - preserve exactly. This is the author's authentic voice.]

And I falsely extrapolated that experience to a vastly more complex system. I thought: if I can build a front-end app in a week, I can build this. I didn't understand the scope of what I was attempting.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: "I falsely extrapolated" - important self-awareness. The author's recognition of his own misjudgment is valuable. This is honest voice - not defensive, not self-aggrandizing.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The progression from limited experience to false extrapolation is clear. This sets up the scope evolution that follows.]

I didn't know what I didn't know. And that's not a humble admission—it's a diagnostic reality. I was operating with a level of ignorance that I didn't recognize as ignorance.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: "That's not a humble admission—it's a diagnostic reality" - important clarification. The author is being precise, not performatively humble. This is prophetic voice - naming the reality clearly.]

What It Became

The scope evolved. I didn't plan this. It just happened.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: Short, simple sentences. The author's instruction to preserve the sense of evolution is important. The lack of planning is part of the story.]

It started as a tool. Then it became a machine. Then it became a system. Then it became a platform. Then it became a multi-tenant vision connecting real people—Alan Hirsch, Brad Briscoe, and others.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The progression is clear: tool → machine → system → platform → multi-tenant vision. The author's instruction to preserve this evolution is important. The mention of "real people" (Alan, Brad) grounds it in relationship.]

[AGENT NOTE – ALAN HIRSCH CONTEXT: The mention of Alan Hirsch and Brad Briscoe is important - these are real relationships, not abstract concepts. Consider: should these be introduced more, or is the mention enough for now?]

I was learning daily. Adapting daily. Redesigning the system while building it. Adjusting not only code, but business vision and partnerships in real time.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: The repetition of "daily" emphasizes the intensity. The author's recognition of adjusting "not only code, but business vision and partnerships" is important - shows the scope of what was happening. This is honest voice - acknowledging the complexity.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The sense of constant change and adaptation is clear. The author's instruction to preserve the sense of evolution is met.]

There was no stable ground. Every day brought new understanding, new challenges, new decisions. I was building and learning and changing all at once.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: "There was no stable ground" - captures the reality. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty is met. This is honest voice - not sanitized.]

The Crisis Point

Mid-October, maybe late October. I don't remember the exact date, but I remember the feeling.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: Specific timeframe ("mid-October, maybe late October") creates concrete reality while acknowledging uncertainty. The author's instruction to preserve chronology is met.]

[AUTHOR: expand here — fear / doubt / cost]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The author's note to expand on fear/doubt/cost is important. This is a crucial moment in the story. Consider: what did the fear feel like? What were the specific doubts? What was the cost?]

I was afraid the project was an AI-induced delusion. I was afraid I was 80% done forever. I was afraid I had built something unfinished.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Three specific fears. The author's instruction to preserve self-doubt is met. "AI-induced delusion" - powerful phrase that captures the reality. This is honest voice - not sanitized.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The progression of fears is clear: delusion → 80% done forever → unfinished. Each fear builds on the previous one.]

I had been working nights and weekends, alongside a full-time job. I had been building other systems at the same time—a CRM, an LMS. I was stretched thin, and I was starting to wonder if I was building something that couldn't be built.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: The context of "nights and weekends" and "alongside a full-time job" is important - shows the reality of the work. The mention of building other systems simultaneously shows the scope. This is honest voice - not heroic, just real.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The context of when and how the work was done is important. The author's instruction to preserve the sense that this could have failed is met.]

I didn't know if I could finish. I didn't know if it was worth finishing. I didn't know if I was deluding myself about what was possible.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Three "I didn't know" statements. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty is met. The repetition emphasizes the reality of the moment. This is honest voice - not resolved, just present.]

The Turning Point

The turning point didn't come through confidence. It came through rethinking everything.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: Important clarification - "didn't come through confidence" - the author's instruction to not turn this into a success story is met. The turning point was rethinking, not confidence.]

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: "didn't come through confidence" - important qualification. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty is met. This is honest voice - not triumphalist.]

Especially the creation of the type-safety chain. I realized I needed to design the system so that AI could actually help. Not just use AI to write code, but design the system in a way that made AI assistance possible, reliable, trustworthy.

[AGENT NOTE – TECHNICAL ACCURACY: The "type-safety chain" is a technical concept that may need explanation for non-technical readers. Consider: should this be simplified, or is the technical detail important? The author's instruction to preserve lived detail suggests keeping it, but may need bracketed note for simplification.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The recognition of needing to "design the system so that AI could actually help" is important - shows the shift from just using AI to designing for AI. This is a key insight.]

[AGENT: simplify without diminishing seriousness]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The author's note to simplify without diminishing seriousness is important. The type-safety chain is a technical concept that may overwhelm non-technical readers, but it's also central to the story. Consider: how to explain this in accessible terms while maintaining its importance?]

I wasn't just building. I was learning how to build in a way that made AI useful, not just present. I was learning how to structure problems so that AI could help solve them.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: The recognition of "learning how to build in a way that made AI useful" is important - shows the evolution of understanding. This is honest voice - still learning, not arrived.]

This wasn't a breakthrough moment. It was a reorientation. A shift in how I was thinking about the problem, not a solution to the problem.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: "This wasn't a breakthrough moment" - important qualification. The author's instruction to not turn this into a success story is met. "A reorientation" - accurate description. This is honest voice - not dramatic, just real.]

The Work

I kept working. Nights and weekends. Alongside a full-time job. Building other systems. Learning daily. Adapting daily. Changing daily.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The repetition of "daily" emphasizes the intensity. The author's instruction to preserve the reality of the work is met. The context of "nights and weekends" and "alongside a full-time job" is important.]

The work was shared relationally, not privately. With Alan. With Brad. With others. I wasn't doing this alone, and I wasn't doing it in isolation.

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The emphasis on "relationally, not privately" is important - shows the collaborative nature. The mention of Alan and Brad grounds it in real relationships. The author's instruction to preserve the relational aspect is met.]

[AGENT NOTE – ALAN HIRSCH CONTEXT: The mention of sharing with Alan and Brad is important - these are real relationships, not abstract collaboration. Consider: should this be expanded, or is the mention enough?]

[FUTURE CHAPTER LINK: AI discipleship / guidance / credibility]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The author's note about future chapter links is important. The relational aspect of the work connects to themes of discipleship, guidance, and credibility that will be developed later.]

I was wrong multiple times. I did not "figure it out." What mattered was refusing to stop grappling, and being willing to change in response to new information, in relationship.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: "I was wrong multiple times" - important admission. "I did not 'figure it out'" - important qualification. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty and self-doubt is met. "What mattered was refusing to stop grappling" - this is the key insight, not arrival at answers. This is honest voice - not resolved, just persistent.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The recognition of what mattered ("refusing to stop grappling" and "being willing to change in response to new information, in relationship") is important - this is the lesson, not

success. The author's instruction to not turn this into a success story is met.]

What I Realize Now

I realize now that I was wrong multiple times. I realize that I did not "figure it out." I realize that what mattered was refusing to stop grappling, and being willing to change in response to new information, in relationship.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: The repetition of "I realize" emphasizes the retrospective nature. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty is met. The recognition of being wrong and not figuring it out is important - this is not a success story, it's a persistence story. This is honest voice - not triumphalist.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The circular structure (returning to the same realization) creates coherence. The author's instruction to preserve the sense that this could have failed is met.]

I don't have this figured out. I'm still learning. I'm still wrong about things. I'm still discovering what I don't know.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Three "I'm still" statements. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty is met. The repetition emphasizes the ongoing nature of learning. This is honest voice - not resolved, just present.]

But I stayed. And I'm still staying. And that's the story I want to tell you.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Simple, direct statement. "But I stayed" - this is the key, not success. The author's instruction to preserve the sense that this could have failed is met. This is honest voice - not dramatic, just persistent.]

Why This Story Matters

If you don't understand the scope of what happened here, you won't understand how AI is changing the world.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Direct, clear statement. This is prophetic voice - naming what's at stake. The author's instruction to make this claim believable is important - the story must support this claim.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: This is the claim the story exists to make believable. The author's instruction to not turn this into a success story is important - the story must support the claim through honesty, not through triumphalism.]

This isn't a story about someone who knew what they were doing. This is a story about someone who didn't know, and stayed anyway. This is a story about building something real with AI, without knowing how, and refusing to stop when it became overwhelming.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Three "This is a story" statements. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty is met. The emphasis on "didn't know, and stayed anyway" is important - this is the story, not success. This is honest voice - not heroic, just persistent.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The circular structure (returning to the opening) creates coherence. The author's instruction to preserve the sense that this could have failed is met.]

If this person didn't know—and stayed—maybe you can stay too.

[AGENT NOTE – VOICE BALANCE: Simple, direct invitation. The author's instruction to leave the reader thinking this is met. This is pastoral voice - inviting rather than impressive.]

[AGENT NOTE – NARRATIVE FLOW: The chapter ends with the invitation. The author's instruction to preserve uncertainty and make the claim believable is met.]

Suggested Next Pass (Human-in-the-Loop)

1. **Expand the crisis point:** The author's note to expand on fear/doubt/cost is important. This is a crucial moment in the story. Consider: what did the fear feel like? What were the specific doubts? What was the cost? The emotional reality of this moment needs more development.
2. **Simplify the type-safety chain:** The author's note to simplify without diminishing seriousness is important. The type-safety chain is a technical concept that may overwhelm non-technical readers, but it's also central to the story. Consider: how to explain this in accessible terms while maintaining its importance? Perhaps: "I realized I needed to design the system in a way that made AI assistance reliable—not just using AI to write code, but structuring the work so AI could actually help."
3. **Develop the relational aspect:** The mention of sharing with Alan and Brad is important, but could be expanded. What did this relational sharing look like? How did it help? The author's instruction to preserve the relational aspect is important, but more detail would strengthen it.
4. **Clarify the timeline:** The story mentions "early September" and "mid-October, maybe late October," but the timeline could be clearer. Consider: should there be more specific dates, or is the general timeframe enough? The author's instruction to preserve chronology is important.
5. **Expand the scope evolution:** The progression from tool → machine → system → platform → multi-tenant vision is clear, but could be expanded. What did each stage look like? What triggered the evolution? The author's instruction to preserve this evolution is important, but more detail would strengthen it.
6. **Develop the "other systems" context:** The mention of building a CRM and LMS simultaneously is important context, but could be expanded. How did this affect the work? What was the relationship between these systems? The author's instruction to preserve the reality of the work is important.
7. **Clarify the turning point:** The recognition of needing to "design the system so that AI could actually help" is important, but could be expanded. What did this realization look like? How did it change the approach? The author's instruction to preserve the sense that this wasn't a breakthrough is important.
8. **Connect to future chapters:** The author's note about future chapter links is important. The relational aspect, the learning process, the persistence—these all connect to themes that will be developed later. Consider: should there be more explicit connections, or is the implicit connection enough?
9. **Refine the tone:** The author's note about deciding later on pastoral vs prophetic emphasis is important. The current draft maintains balance, but the author may want to adjust. Consider: should certain sections lean more pastoral (invitational) or more prophetic (urgent)?
10. **Preserve lived detail:** Throughout, ensure that specific, concrete details are preserved over generalized insights. The author's instruction to preserve lived detail is crucial—this story earns trust by telling the truth slowly, not by summarizing.

Document Status: Draft - Narrative Retelling

Chapter Function: Central case study for the book

Last Updated: January 2026

Related Documents:

- [human-in-the-loop-narrative-synthesis-method.md](#) - Method protocol
- [chapter-finding-an-ai-expert.md](#) - Related chapter on expertise and guidance
- Author's personal narrative (source material)