

FOUNDER QUEST

Start a real business in a couple of months with AI and a laptop

A free build-along from Claude, Actually. Tested on real teenagers, including the ones who broke it and made it better.

This is a real game with a real save file. The save file is a business you actually own at the end. The XP is real skill. The final boss is Launch.

Character creation (the fill-in part)

This guide is a template. Before you press start, an adult helps you fill in four things. Write them on your character sheet here:

- **Founder name / codename:**
- **Starting Gold:** \$ (any number works, see “Your Gold is a dial” below)
- **Launch day (the final-boss deadline):** (the day the business has to be live, pick a real one)
- **Hours per week you’ll grind:** (15 to 20 a week is a normal pace)

That’s it. Everything else in here plays the same whether your Gold is five thousand or fifty.

The Quest

Build a real business over the next couple of months. From idea to launched product. Using the tools that will define the next decade of work: AI, a modern web stack, and a laptop.

This isn’t a class. It’s a job with a paycheck and levels. The work is the curriculum.

Beat the game and you’ll have:

- Operated your laptop like a pro, not a kid playing on it
- Used AI the way pros do, including knowing when it’s wrong
- Researched, validated, and chosen a business idea that’s yours

- Decided your own legal structure and made the business real
- Built a brand from scratch
- Launched a website you own
- Landed your first customers, or learned exactly why you didn't

Six Levels. Six Boss Fights. One final boss. Let's go.

The signature side-quest: "Caught the Oracle Lying"

The Oracle is your AI assistant. It knows a lot. It also lies with total confidence, and it does this all the time.

Every Level, you earn the **Caught the Oracle Lying** achievement at least once: you find one thing the AI told you confidently that turned out wrong or off, and you write it in your Quest Log. One per Level, minimum. Earn all six and you've basically beaten the hardest part of the whole game.

This is the most important thing in here. AI is fast and useful and confidently wrong. Most adults using it have not figured this out yet. By August you'll trust the tool and check it at the same time, which is the entire skill. Everything else in this game is just the excuse to practice it on something real.

If you finish a Level and didn't catch the Oracle in a single mistake, you probably weren't pushing it hard enough. Go back and argue with it more.

Your Gold is a dial

The number doesn't change the quests. It only changes how much room you have to spend. Pick the tier that's real for you:

- **Full (around \$5,000):** real operating budget, you can pay for a nicer site, a small ad test, the works.
- **Lean (\$300 to 500):** free or cheap tools only (Carrd, Wave, free fonts), skip paid ads, scrappier launch. Same six Levels.
- **Near-free (\$0 to 100):** use the laptop you already have, a free site builder, a free email, and your own network instead of ads. You can still launch a real thing. Plenty of

businesses started here.

Two rules no matter the tier:

1. Every dollar you don't spend is profit you keep. Costs aren't free. They come out of the same pile of Gold.
2. The computer is capital, not an expense. Whatever laptop you use, log it in your books as a business asset. A computer belongs on the books, not against your operating budget.

Boss-Fight rewards (the payment table below) are also a dial. They can be real cash, or privileges, or just the satisfaction of clearing the Level. The adult running this with you decides. The game works either way.

Your AI tools (and the age rule, read this with a parent)

You'll lean on two kinds of AI: a chat assistant (the Oracle) for thinking, writing, and research, and an image tool for your logo.

If you're under 18, this part matters. ChatGPT (and Codex, its coding tool) allows users 13 and up **with a parent's permission**, so that's your main AI assistant. An adult sets up the account and stays in the loop. Claude's own terms are built for 18+, so if you want to use Claude too, a parent owns and supervises that account. Either way, an adult sets up the tools with you on day one. That setup is the tutorial, not a chore.

The skill is the same no matter which assistant you use: ask a good question, argue with the answer, and catch it when it's wrong.

The map (your run order)

About 15 to 20 hours a week while you build it. Once it's running, you operate it on about 10 hours a week.

- **Level 1, Laptop & Tools:** week one
- **Level 2, Idea & Validation:** two weeks (the long pole, the hardest and most important)
- **Level 3, Legal:** about a week

- **Level 4, Brand:** about a week
- **Level 5, Website:** two weeks
- **Level 6, Launch (final boss):** two weeks
- **Victory screen: wrap, retro, celebrate**

Your launch day (the one you wrote on your character sheet) is the hard line. The business ships before it.

The Six Levels

Level 1: Laptop & Toolset

Quest goal: Get fluent on your laptop and your AI/business toolkit before you build anything.

Objectives: - [] Laptop set up and personalized (accounts, password manager) - [] Core tools installed and explored: two browsers, a notes app, your AI assistant, and a free Google account (Docs, Sheets, Drive, Gmail run in the browser, nothing to download) - [] Quest Log started (this is where your first "Oracle got it wrong" entry lives) - [] Two hours on keyboard shortcuts and two hours of laptop tutorials (file management, multitasking) - [] A project folder set up: **Business/** with subfolders **01-Research**, **02-Legal**, **03-Brand**, **04-Website**, **05-Marketing**, **06-Finances** - [] A "learn to prompt" session: ask the same question vaguely, then specifically, then ask the AI to critique its own answer

Side-quest, Caught the Oracle Lying: During the prompt practice above, push the AI until it says something wrong or sloppy, then log it. Easy first catch.

Boss Fight (clear to advance): you move around the laptop without thinking, you can ask the AI a good question, your Quest Log is started, and your first Oracle mistake is logged.

Level 2: Idea & Validation

Quest goal: Find and pick a real business that's *yours*, that you can start with your Gold and keep running afterward.

This is the hardest Level and the most important. The idea has to come from you. The AI is a brainstorming partner that pushes your thinking, not a vending machine you pull an idea out of. The best idea usually comes from combining what the AI suggests with something only *you* know: your interests, your skills, the problems you actually see.

Don't run one prompt and grab the first idea. Run several, argue with the answers, and write down what *you* think after each.

Objectives: - [] Brainstormed at least 20 ideas (volume first, no filtering) - [] Narrowed to 5 using the scoring rubric - [] Market research on each finalist - [] Interviewed at least 5 real people in the target market (real conversations, not surveys) - [] Picked ONE idea with a 1-2 page written memo defending it - [] Ran it through the three validation questions - [] Defined your ideal customer in detail

Your brainstorming prompts (run at least three, defend the survivor):

1. Start from you.

Here's me: my interests are [...], skills I have or could learn fast are [...], I have [budget] and about 10 hours a week during school. Don't suggest generic ideas. Find business ideas that sit at the intersection of what I'm into and what people actually pay for. For each, tell me why it fits *me* specifically.

2. Volume.

I want an online business I can start with [budget] and run about 10 hours a week. Brainstorm 20 ideas. For each: what it does, who the customer is, why they'd pay, realistic beginner monthly revenue, and the main risk. Don't pad. Be honest about which are oversaturated.

3. Problems, not products.

Here are 10 problems or annoyances I or people around me actually deal with: [list them]. Turn each into a possible business. Which would people pay to make go away?

4. Stress-test my favorite.

My favorite idea so far is [idea]. Argue why it will fail. Be brutal. Give me the 5 most likely reasons it flops and what would have to be true to survive each one.

5. Who already does this.

For [idea], who are the existing players? Show me 5, what they charge, and where there's a gap a scrappy newcomer could win. Be specific, not "offer better service."

The scoring rubric (1-5 each): personal interest (will I still care in 6 months?), realistic with my budget, time-realistic for school, solves a real problem, online-friendly.

The three validation questions: Who *specifically* has this problem? What are they doing about it now? Why would they pay *you*? (Not "I'm cheaper." That's a race to the bottom.)

Side-quest, Caught the Oracle Lying: When you research existing players or "realistic monthly revenue," the AI loves to make up numbers and competitors. Verify one, find it wrong, log it.

Boss Fight (clear to advance): you can explain your business in one sentence, name your customer, and say why they'd pay. Killing a bad idea here counts as a clear, not a fail.

Level 3: Legal Foundation

Quest goal: Decide your structure, then make the business real. The decision comes before the paperwork, and the decision is yours to research and defend.

Objectives: - [] Wrote a one-page memo comparing sole proprietorship, single-member LLC, and S-corp-later on cost, paperwork, liability, taxes, and complexity. Pick one and defend it. - [] Presented it to your coach and got a green light before filing - [] Verified your business name (state database, domain, social handles) - [] Filed your chosen structure - [] Got an EIN from the IRS (free, about 15 minutes) - [] Opened a business bank account (business money never mixes with personal) - [] Set up free bookkeeping and logged your laptop as your first business asset - [] Checked whether your business needs a local license

Real numbers matter here. Costs vary by state, and some are bigger than people expect. For example, a California LLC owes an \$800 annual franchise tax from year one whether it

makes money or not, while a sole proprietorship doesn't. Look up *your* state's real numbers (verify them, don't trust the AI's first answer), and let them change your recommendation. That's the point.

The legal prompt:

I'm starting an online business in [your state] as a young founder. My business is [description]. Compare sole proprietorship, single-member LLC, and S-corp-later on cost, paperwork, liability protection, taxes, and complexity. Be honest about which makes sense for a first-time founder under \$50K first-year revenue. Tell me the real state-specific fees and which ones recur every year.

Side-quest, Caught the Oracle Lying: This is the easiest Level to catch it. Legal fees and tax numbers are exactly where the AI guesses confidently and gets it wrong. Check one fee against your state's real site, find the gap, log it.

Boss Fight (clear to advance): you chose a structure and can defend why. Business filed, EIN and bank account in hand, and you know what you owe and when.

Level 4: Brand Foundation

Quest goal: Build a brand that doesn't look like every other side hustle.

Objectives: - [] One-page brand brief: what you do (one sentence), who it's for, what makes you different, voice (3-5 adjectives) - [] Researched 10 competitors and screenshotted their branding - [] Color palette (3-5 hex codes) and typography (1-2 free fonts) - [] A logo (AI image gen, then refine): a transparent PNG and a square social version - [] 3 sample headlines and 3 sample captions in your voice - [] Domain and matching social handles secured in one sitting so they line up

The brand prompt:

I'm building a brand for [business]. Target customer: [description]. Develop: (1) a one-sentence positioning statement, (2) three voice adjectives with examples, (3) five brand names with reasoning, (4) three taglines. Push back if my positioning is generic. I want to stand out, not blend in.

The logo prompt (image tool):

Create a clean, modern logo for [brand name], a [business] for [audience]. Style: [3 adjectives]. Colors: [palette]. It must work as a small profile picture and a large header. Show me 4 variations.

Side-quest, Caught the Oracle Lying: Ask the image tool for text in the logo, or ask the chat AI if a brand name is "available." Watch it mangle letters or claim a taken name is free. Log it.

Boss Fight (clear to advance): you have a logo, palette, fonts, and a brief someone else could create on-brand content from. Don't spend three days on a font. Set a deadline and ship.

Level 5: Website Build

Quest goal: Launch a real website that doesn't look like a side hustle.

Core build (this is what clearing the Level means): - [] Domain purchased and connected - [] Platform chosen (see the tree below) and set up - [] Pages: Home, About, Product/Service, Contact, Footer with legal links - [] Mobile-first: looks at least as good on a phone as on a laptop - [] All copy written by you (AI edits, you author). No placeholders. - [] A real email address on your domain - [] A way to take payment or capture a lead - [] Tested on phone, tablet, and laptop

Stretch loot (after it's live, not before): basic SEO, analytics, search console.

Platform decision tree: physical products → Shopify. Digital products or courses → Squarespace or Webflow. Service with bookings → Squarespace plus a scheduler. Portfolio or one-pager → Carrd (cheapest) or Squarespace.

The website copy prompt:

Copy for my business website. Business: [description]. Customer: [description]. Voice: [3 adjectives]. Write: (1) a hero headline (10 words max) and subheading (20 max), (2) a 3-paragraph About explaining why I started this, (3) a value proposition for the product

page, (4) CTA button text that isn't generic. Read like a real person, not AI. No marketing speak.

Side-quest, Caught the Oracle Lying: If the AI hands you code, it's prime lying territory. Before you paste anything, make it explain the code. Find one line that doesn't do what it claimed, log it.

Boss Fight (clear to advance): a stranger finds your site, gets what you do in 5 seconds, and knows how to buy or contact you in 30. Before you paste in any AI-built code or copy, you have to be able to explain what it does. "Explain this" comes before "make it work."

Level 6: Launch & First Traction (FINAL BOSS)

Quest goal: Get the first customer, or learn why you couldn't.

This is the final boss. Everything you leveled up feeds into it.

Objectives: - [] Social accounts on at least 2 platforms - [] First 10 pieces of content posted - [] Soft-launched to your own network first (the people you interviewed in Level 2) - [] Direct outreach to at least 20 potential customers - [] Lead capture live - [] If your Gold allows, one small paid-traffic test, results read: cost per click, per lead, per sale - [] First sale OR a detailed write-up of why none happened and what you'd change - [] A launch retrospective: what worked, what didn't, what's next

The launch prompt:

My business is launching: [description]. Customer: [description]. Marketing budget: [remaining]. Build a 30-day launch plan that (1) doesn't rely only on paid ads, (2) uses my network and social, (3) has specific daily actions, (4) measurable goals, (5) an honest take on whether it can hit them. Push back if my targets are unrealistic.

Side-quest, Caught the Oracle Lying: The launch plan will promise numbers that sound great and aren't realistic. Make the AI defend one target, watch it fold, log it. Last catch of the run.

Boss Fight (beat the game): you launched. You got customers, or you learned exactly why you didn't. Either is a win. Failure with learning beats fake success.

Loot Table (a template, set your own amounts)

Level	Boss Fight	Reward
1	Laptop & Toolset	\$_____
2	Idea Validation	\$_____
3	Legal Foundation	\$_____
4	Brand Foundation	\$_____
5	Website Build	\$_____
6	Launch & Traction	\$_____

You get paid for cleared Levels, not effort. Beat the Boss Fight, collect the loot. Miss it, no payout until it's done. No Quest Log entry and no deliverable means no reward at the weekly check-in. The work has to be visible. Anything you actually earn from the business is yours, on top.

How to Use AI (the real lessons, your stat boosts)

1. **Co-pilot, not autopilot.** Think faster, don't outsource the thinking.
2. **Bad prompts get bad answers.** Be specific. Give context. Say what you want and what you don't.
3. **Pressure-test it.** Ask "what could go wrong?" and "what's the strongest counter-argument?" Never take the first answer as truth.
4. **Use the right tool for the job.** Different assistants are better at different things. Try more than one.
5. **Never paste AI output as final work.** Edit it. Rewrite it. Make it sound like you. AI-sounding content is obvious and turns people off.

6. **Verify, especially numbers and dates.** This is why you earn Caught the Oracle Lying once a Level. By August you'll trust the tool and check it at the same time. That's the whole skill.

The Show-Up Rule (optional, but it has teeth)

Founders don't get woken up. If your coach turns this on: two mornings a week, check in by a set time with a photo of yourself somewhere outside the house (so you can't fake it from bed) and one line, your number-one task for the day. Late means it comes off that Level's reward. Only two days, you've still got a life. Have your fun. But on a standup morning, the time is the line. That's exactly how it works once you have a boss, or once you *are* the boss and a client is keeping time.

Victory screen

This whole quest started as something a dad built for his daughter, the summer before she left for college. What he told her is what I'll tell you: whenever you run it, and at whatever pace, you come out the other side having already built a real business, filed real paperwork, made real decisions, and used real AI tools for something that mattered. You operate at a different level than the players around you, because most of them never pressed start.

You won't be impressed by AI. You'll know how to use it. You won't be scared of starting things. You'll have done it. You won't be intimidated by business. You'll get the moving parts.

That's the win. Revenue is the bonus.

Now go pick a founder codename and start Level 1. Press start.

Free from Claude, Actually. Built by a dad and Claude, tested on real kids. Use it, change it, pass it on.