

# The Jason Cavness Experience

## Common Startup Struggles and Mistakes

The  
Jason Cavness  
EXPERIENCE  
Podcast



# About Jason Cavness



Jason is an INJF tattooed Retired U.S. Army Officer and CEO/Founder of CavnessHR. Which provides HR to companies with 49 or fewer people

He hosts The Jason Cavness Experience, a top 2.5% and top 81 tech global podcast with 300+ conversations.

His motto: “Be Great Every Day.”

# Start Here: Common Startup Struggles and Mistakes

No startup journey is smooth and no founder gets it right the first time.

Across 300+ conversations on The Jason Cavness Experience, I've heard raw, honest stories of the missteps, blind spots and growing pains that come with building something from the ground up.

This eBook highlights some of the most common struggles founders face. From hiring mistakes and co-founder conflict to burnout, doubt and misaligned priorities.

But it's not about shame. It's about learning. These lessons are shared so you can avoid what others have already lived through and move forward with more clarity and resilience.

# Funding and Fundraising Challenges

## 1. The Problem

Raising capital is one of the most frustrating barriers founders face.

From pitching investors to navigating grants, founders often hit walls. Especially those outside mainstream networks.

## 2. Why This Happens

Many founders assume if they build something great, funding will follow. But capital flows through relationships, storytelling and perceived investability, not just traction or mission. For underestimated founders, bias adds another layer of difficulty.

## 3. Real Example

“Fundraising is harder than product.” Rafael Masters

When I tried raising funds for CavnessHR. I faced countless no's and more silence than feedback. Some investors wouldn't even take a meeting. Others asked me to "come back later" once we had revenue.

#### 4. Action Plan

- Build investor relationships before you ask for money.
- Match your capital source to your business model: VC ≠ right for everyone.
- Use platforms like Wefunder if you're community-first.
- Keep refining your pitch and update your traction monthly.
- **Normalize rejection. Learn, iterate and keep going.**

#### 5. Reflection Question

What specific story are you telling investors and does it create urgency to invest?

# Product Development and Market Fit Issues

## 1. The Problem

Startups often build too soon and too fast. The result? Months (or years) building something people don't need or won't pay for.

## 2. Why This Happens

Founders fall in love with their ideas. It feels productive to build. But **skipping early validation leads to beautiful products that solve no real problem.**

## 3. Real Example

“Build what the user needs not what you wish they needed.” – Rafael Masters

“Don’t make an MVP a physical product until you’ve validated the concept.” – Sarah Bell

With CavnessHR, I originally had a vision shaped more by my experience than by user interviews.

I had to slow down, ask better questions and learn that what I wanted to build wasn't always what small business owners actually needed.

#### 4. Action Plan

- Interview 15–20 people in your target segment.
- Identify a “pants-on-fire” problem they’d pay to solve.
- Build, sketch or test with a clickable prototype first.
- Ask: “Would you pay for this today?”
- Let demand shape the build and not assumptions.

## 5. Reflection Question

Are you building what customers are begging for or what you wish they cared about?

# Marketing, Sales and Customer Acquisition

## 1. The Problem

Many founders struggle to get customers even with a great product. Marketing feels like shouting into the void and sales processes are inconsistent.

## 2. Why This Happens

Founders often undervalue messaging, pricing and relationship-based selling. They focus on features, not outcomes. Or worse, they think posting on social media is enough.

## 3. Real Example

“You need to be obsessed with the problem and how your customer experiences it.” – Zion Zhang

For Cavness HR, I had to learn sales by doing it badly first. Cold calls, failed follow-ups, unclear pricing . I've made every mistake. What worked? Narrowing my message and solving one pain clearly. Then repeating it everywhere.

#### 4. Action Plan

- Define your value proposition in 10 words or less.
- Create a repeatable sales system.
- Use customer testimonials and objections to shape messaging.
- **Test pricing early, undercharging is common.**
- Automate marketing basics.

#### 5. Reflection Question

Do you know where your next 5 customers are coming from and how to reach them?

# Team Management, Hiring and Culture

## 1. The Problem

Managing people is harder than building products. Poor hiring, unclear roles and toxic culture are silent killers in early startups.

## 2. Why This Happens

Many founders are first-time managers. They hire quickly under pressure or neglect to create structure. They assume people can lead themselves without direction.

## 3. Real Example

“Hire people you trust, then trust them.” – Andrew Biddle

Coming from the military, I thought startup leadership would be completely different. But the fundamentals are actually the same.

Clear expectations, mutual trust and accountability matter in both environments. Leading a small, scrappy team still comes down to clarity, ownership and support.

#### 4. Action Plan

- Write job descriptions based on outcomes, not tasks.
- Set weekly check-ins and clear KPIs for everyone.
- Build a culture of feedback and forgiveness.
- Hire slow, but not too slow. Fire with integrity, but don't wait too long.
- Lead by listening, especially across cultures.

#### 5. Reflection Question

Does everyone on your team know what success looks like this week?

# Work-Life Balance and Mental Health Toll

## 1. The Problem

Startups consume everything, time, energy and relationships. Founders often burn out before the company does.

## 2. Why This Happens

The hustle myth tells founders to grind endlessly. But when everything is a priority. Nothing gets done well and your health suffers first.

## 3. Real Example

“The entrepreneur journey is heavy. If you don’t control the pace, it’ll consume you.” Ken Duong

There were weeks I barely slept while trying to juggle CavnessHR, podcasting and content.

I told myself it was necessary. It wasn't. What actually helped? Boundaries, deep work windows and time off without guilt.

#### 4. Action Plan

- Set 1-2 “non-negotiables” daily (sleep, movement, family).
- Build in rest like you build in meetings.
- Use time-blocking and protect focus hours.
- Acknowledge burnout signals and don't ignore them.
- Reconnect with why you're doing this work.

#### 5. Reflection Question

Are you building a business that serves your life or one that's consuming it?

# Overthinking, Procrastination, and Low Agency

## 1. The Problem

Many founders stay stuck in “planning mode” and delay execution, hoping for perfect timing or certainty that never comes.

## 2. Why This Happens

It's safer to plan than to risk failure. But overthinking is a form of resistance. Founders need to ship fast, learn and iterate, not chase perfection.

## 3. Real Example

“Overthinking and procrastination are signs of low agency.” Zion Zhang

I've stalled on things like launching features or asking for help. All in the name of “preparing.” But I've learned more from one messy launch than 10 perfect plans. Progress starts with movement.

## 4. Action Plan

- Create a “1-hour version” of your idea and test it.
- Limit planning time to 48 hours max.
- Ship something imperfect weekly and review it.
- Track action, not intentions.
- Use public accountability to break inertia.

## 5. Reflection Question

What decision are you delaying right now and what would happen if you just acted?

# Rejection and Tough Moments

## 1. The Problem

Founders face more no's than yeses. Rejection from investors, users and partners is part of the journey. But it can wear you down.

## 2. Why This Happens

Rejection is personal when your startup feels like your identity. But the truth is, “no” often means not now, not yet, or not the right fit, not a reflection of your worth.

## 3. Real Example

“Rejection is not a stop sign. It’s a reroute.” – Christina Brennan

I’ve had days where three people ghosted me and another said my product was “pointless.” Those moments sting. But each one taught me something: about my pitch, my audience, or my resilience.

## 4. Action Plan

- De-personalize rejection: track it like data
- Ask for feedback even if it hurts
- Celebrate small wins and yeses, no matter how small
- Build founder community to normalize the hard days
- Use rejection as a refinement tool

## 5. Reflection Question

How are you turning “no” into insight and not discouragement?

# External Factors, Regulations, and Market Specifics

## 1. The Problem

Even great startups hit walls due to laws, taxes, logistics, or regional nuances. Regulations and infrastructure challenges can slow progress.

## 2. Why This Happens

Many founders focus on the product and forget that real-world business is messy shaped by supply chains, licensing, government and geography.

## 3. Real Example

“Doing business in Vietnam taught me that culture and expectations matter as much as contracts.” – Van Nguyen

I've had to adapt CavnessHR's growth to comply with U.S. business laws. But also learned how different things operate in Vietnam. Time zones, labor laws even importing gear. These aren't startup problems, they're real-world ones.

#### 4. Action Plan

- Research your city/state/country regulations upfront
- Talk to other founders in your industry and region
- Use local partners or consultants for legal/logistics
- **Expect delays and build in buffer time**
- Map your external risks quarterly

#### 5. Reflection Question

What “non-product” factor could blindside your business if ignored?

# Systemic Barriers and Inequalities

## 1. The Problem

Founders from underrepresented backgrounds face structural challenges in funding, hiring, visibility and support.

## 2. Why This Happens

The startup world isn't neutral. Networks, access and assumptions skew toward privilege. These barriers are real, but rarely discussed openly.

## 3. Real Example

**“It's hard to be what you can't see, that's why representation matters.” Kika Escobar Bascur**

I've been underestimated more times than I can count. That's why I built platforms like CavnessHR and my podcast.

## 4. Action Plan

- Name the barriers, don't ignore them
- Build alliances with founders facing similar struggles
- Mentor others and get mentored
- Leverage platforms that value inclusion
- Create your own table when you're not invited to one

## 5. Reflection Question

How can your startup help create access for others not just survive for yourself?

# Closing Thoughts

Mistakes don't define founders. How they respond does.

Every story in this eBook is a reminder that struggle is not failure. It's part of the process. The missed hires, the wrong turns, the pivots, the late-night doubt. It's all normal.

What separates the ones who build something meaningful is the willingness to learn fast, stay honest and keep moving.

If one insight in this eBook helps you avoid a common trap or gives you the clarity to correct course. You're already ahead.

Be Great Every Day!

Jason Cavness

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