



THE CONVICTION ENGINE REPORT™

This book has the fuel of a great one—  
*and it files its stories in a ledger  
instead of building them for the reader.*

| MANUSCRIPT                   | CHAPTERS READ | LENGTH       | DATE        |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>The Grain of the Wood</i> | 9             | 34,600 words | August 2026 |

SAMPLE REPORT — PREPARED ON A FICTIONAL MANUSCRIPT SO YOU CAN SEE THE COMPLETE INSTRUMENT

## The Verdict

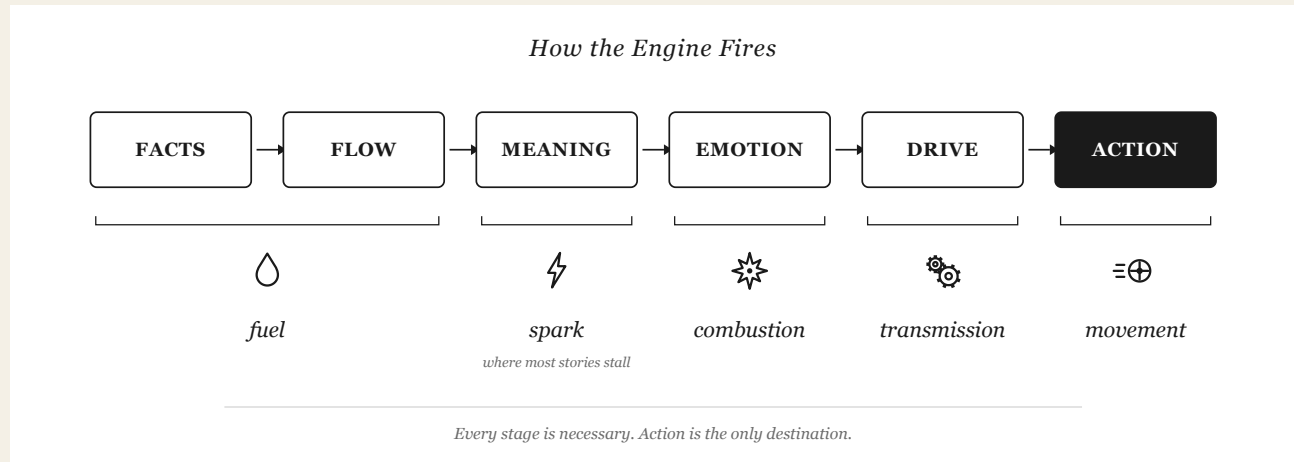
Start with what is racing, because it genuinely is: the raw material of this manuscript. The \$11,000 mistake, the grandfather who wouldn't demonstrate a cut, the foreman's pocket notebook, an apprentice's departure hidden inside a scheduling note—this is a book-length supply of specific, earned, load-bearing fact, curated by someone who plainly lived it. The reader can trust every number and every splinter. Fuel is not this book's problem, and neither is honesty.

The problem is structural, and it is consistent enough to be a signature: nearly every chapter announces its conclusion first, then presents the years in the order they happened as supporting documentation. The scenes that break through still land—this material carries feeling on its own back—but the lesson arrives before any question exists to carry it, and the chapter ends without a move the reader could make. The reader closes chapter after chapter moved by the man and unequipped by the book, holding a rule they watched no one earn and a feeling with nowhere to go.

The last chapter is the counterargument, and it comes from the same pen: a built scene, a withheld turn, an ask with a name and a deadline. It is the template this report keeps pointing back to. The instrument panel below shows exactly where the chain breaks and where it already runs—read the matrix first, then the three repairs, each of which redirects material this manuscript already owns.

# What the Conviction Engine Is

Most books fail not because the ideas are wrong but because nothing happens to the reader. The Conviction Engine™ is a master framework that explains why some stories change what people *do*, not just what they know or feel. It runs on six sequential stages, and like any engine, every stage has to fire for the audience to move.



**Facts** **the fuel** — the right mix of evidence: enough to earn trust, not so much it floods the engine.

**Flow** **the structure** — the order and timing of revelation. Story has a structure and meaning is its cargo; stories are built, not told. The structure carries the reader toward meaning instead of handing it over on page one.

**Meaning** **the spark** — where conflict, character, change, and stakes turn information into something that matters.

**Emotion** **the combustion** — meaning *felt*: the reader locating themselves inside the story.

**Drive** **the transmission** — feeling converted into the belief that they can act, it will work, and it will matter.

**Action** **the movement** — the only destination. The test of any book is not “what did you learn?” but “what do you want to *do* now?”

The stages are sequential. Weak fuel or a stalled spark chokes everything downstream — a brilliant Drive chapter cannot move a reader who never caught fire at Meaning. This report maps your manuscript onto all six, shows where your engine fires and where the chain breaks, and answers the one question that matters.

# Does Your Engine Fire?



## ● Facts · Fuel

RACING

The fuel is racing. Ledger lines, notebook entries, one ratio that argues a whole chapter—the book trusts single specifics to do the work of paragraphs, and they do. Where the manuscript over-supplies (the fifteen-year inventory), the problem it creates lands downstream, in structure and spark—the facts themselves are chosen and true.

## ● Flow · The Structure

COLD

The chain goes cold here, and everything after it inherits the damage. The dominant structure is the chronicle: lesson first, then the years in order. A conclusion stated on page one leaves no question to inhabit, no trail to walk, and nothing for the ending to reveal—the reader is handed each chapter's meaning before its events. The exceptions—the notebook chapter, the closing frame—prove the author has the structural instinct; the chronicle habit overrides it.

## ● Meaning · Spark

RUNNING

The spark catches more often than the structure deserves—the rocking-chair restoration, Daniel's buried departure, the recital program—because when a person and a cost make it onto the page together, this author's material ignites on its own. It runs without racing: too many chapters still keep their people summarized, so the spark depends on the reader's goodwill instead of the chapter's construction.

## ● Emotion · Combustion

RUNNING

The reader feels this book in flashes—the hand on the chair arm, the recital program, the plane finally handed over—and the feeling is real when a scene is allowed to happen. Between flashes, the chronicle keeps the reader at a professional distance: they respect the shop; they are not in the sawdust. The engine is running here on the strength of moments, not chapters.

## ● Drive · Transmission

MISFIRE

The transmission misfires. The book proves on nearly every page that the author could do these things; it rarely shows the reader they could. The small, repeatable Monday version of each lesson—the entry to write, the tool to hand over—is missing from chapter after chapter, and an ask without a first step comes back as compliments. The arithmetic chapter and the closing handoff show the gear engaging; the rest of the book leaves it slipping.

## ● Action · Movement

RUNNING

The final chapter's ask—name your successor by Friday, hand over one tool—is specific, dated, and earned by the scene before it. It is also carrying the entire book's output. Earlier chapters end on rules and resolutions, which satisfy a reader without moving one; the engine's movement is concentrated in the last thirty pages.



## MISFIRE

*One or more stages keep the engine from taking hold and turning on its own, though it has moments of ignition.*

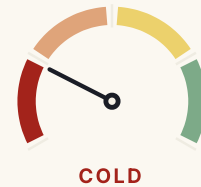
This engine misfires at the high end: the fuel is racing—the ledgers, the notebook entries, the ratio that carries a whole argument—and the scenes spark real feeling when the author lets one person pay one cost on the page. The chain breaks in two places: the structure runs cold (lesson first, then the years in order), and the transmission misfires—the reader is moved in stretches and handed nothing to do with it. One chapter proves the whole machine works: the last one.

## What Will the Reader Do?

What level of change occurs in the audience when they put your book down? There are three levels, and the engine state above determines where your audience is likely to land:

### LEARN

They took in information. The most basic level — an owner's manual does this.



### FEEL

The book generated enough meaning to produce emotion. This is the story level.



### DO

The engine is running and they are moved to act.



WILL THEY ACT?

## Unlikely.

*Don't panic — tune the engine and the needle will rise.*

The reader will feel this book in its best stretches—the hand on the rocking chair's arm, the empty bench after Daniel, the plane finally handed over—and they will finish with real respect for the man and the shop. What they will not do is act, because the feeling is never given a next step: each lesson arrives pre-announced and departs without a move the reader could make on Monday. The closing chapter shows the difference—it asks for something specific, and it has a date on it.

# The Whole Book at a Glance

Every chapter, every stage. Read down a column to see a stage’s pattern across the book; read across a row to see how one chapter fires.

|                                                              | FACT         | FLOW         | MEAN         | EMOT         | DRIV         | ACTI         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Chapter 1 <i>The Lesson of the Ledger</i>                    | RACING       | COLD         | RUNNING      | RUNNING      | MISFIRE      | MISFIRE      |
| Chapter 2 <i>My Grandfather's Rules</i>                      | RACING       | COLD         | RUNNING      | RUNNING      | MISFIRE      | RUNNING      |
| Chapter 3 <i>Ten Clients, Ten Lessons</i>                    | RACING       | MISFIRE      | RUNNING      | MISFIRE      | MISFIRE      | RUNNING      |
| Chapter 4 <i>Everything I Built, 1994–2009</i>               | RUNNING      | COLD         | COLD         | MISFIRE      | MISFIRE      | MISFIRE      |
| Chapter 5 <i>How We Survived the Recession</i>               | RACING       | COLD         | MISFIRE      | RUNNING      | MISFIRE      | RUNNING      |
| Chapter 6 <i>The Foreman's Notebook</i>                      | RACING       | RUNNING      | RUNNING      | RUNNING      | RUNNING      | RUNNING      |
| Chapter 7 <i>Since You Asked: A Field Guide to Splinters</i> | NOT IN SCOPE | NOT IN SCOPE | NOT IN SCOPE | RACING       | NOT IN SCOPE | NOT IN SCOPE |
| Chapter 8 <i>The Arithmetic of Apprenticeship</i>            | RACING       | NOT IN SCOPE | NOT IN SCOPE | NOT IN SCOPE | RUNNING      | NOT IN SCOPE |
| Chapter 9 <i>Handing Over the Plane</i>                      | RACING       | RUNNING      | RACING       | RACING       | RACING       | RACING       |

RACING

RUNNING

MISFIRE

COLD

NOT IN SCOPE

Greyed cells are stages a chapter’s role does not aim to fire (e.g. a comic interlude judged on Emotion alone). They are out of scope, not failures, and are excluded from the book-level read of that stage.

# Chapter by Chapter

## Chapter 1 — *The Lesson of the Ledger*

STRUCTURE: STRAIGHT CHRONOLOGY

MISFIRE

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Fa | FI | Me | Em | Dr | Ac |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|

The chapter states its lesson in the first paragraph—craftsmanship is a decision, not a talent—then walks the shop's first decade in strict order to prove it. The evidence is superb: the ledger lines, the first commission, the exact price of the mistake that nearly ended everything. But the reader is handed the conclusion before there is a question to carry, so each year confirms what the opening already announced. The chapter has fuel a writer would envy and no structure asking the reader to travel anywhere with it.

*“Craftsmanship is a decision you make before you pick up the tool, and this chapter is the story of learning that the hard way.”*  
THE OPENING LINE SPENDS THE DESTINATION—THE DECADE THAT FOLLOWS CAN ONLY AGREE WITH IT.

- **Open inside the mistake, not above it.** The \$11,000 error in year six is the chapter's real engine. Start there, in the room, before the reader knows what it will cost—and let the ledger lines arrive as consequences instead of exhibits.
- **Hold the lesson until it's earned.** Move the opening claim to the final page. Said after the mistake, it lands as a discovery; said before, it turns the chapter into a receipt.

## Chapter 2 — *My Grandfather's Rules*

STRUCTURE: STRAIGHT CHRONOLOGY

MISFIRE

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Fa | FI | Me | Em | Dr | Ac |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|

Nine numbered rules, each introduced, explained, and then illustrated with a summarized memory. The rules are genuinely good and the memories behind them are visibly rich—a man who refused to demonstrate a cut, a chair returned twice, a Saturday of silence after a ruined board. Every one of those memories is compressed to a sentence so the explanation can have the room. The reader receives a well-organized inheritance and never meets the man who left it.

*“Rule four: never sand against the grain, in wood or in people.”*  
A STRONG APHORISM DOING THE WORK A SCENE SHOULD DO—THE RULE SURVIVES, THE GRANDFATHER DISAPPEARS.

- **Trade nine rules for three scenes.** Pick the three rules with the strongest memories attached and build each memory as a full scene that ENDS in its rule. The other six rules can live in a sidebar—the reader will trust all nine because they watched three get made.

## Chapter 3 — *Ten Clients, Ten Lessons*

STRUCTURE: THEMATIC, NOT CHRONOLOGICAL

MISFIRE

Fa

FI

Me

Em

Dr

Ac

A thematic structure—ten client stories organized by lesson rather than calendar—and the right instinct for this material. What breaks it is equal weighting: the client who cried over her mother's restored rocking chair gets the same four paragraphs as the client who wanted a bigger discount. The jumps between cases aren't doing visible work, so the accumulation reads as a list wearing a book's clothes. Two of the ten cases carry real weight; the format files them where the reader can't feel the difference.

*"She ran her hand along the arm of the chair the way you'd touch someone's face."*

THE CHAPTER'S ONE FULLY RENDERED MOMENT—PROOF THE AUTHOR CAN PUT A READER IN THE ROOM WHEN THE STRUCTURE LETS HIM.

- **Let the rocking chair carry the chapter.** The restoration story is a complete narrative with a turn the reader can feel. Give it the spine; let five of the remaining cases become single sharp paragraphs and cut the other four entirely.

## Chapter 4 — *Everything I Built, 1994–2009*

STRUCTURE: STRAIGHT CHRONOLOGY

COLD

Fa

FI

Me

Em

Dr

Ac

Fifteen years of commissions in the order they were built: the conference table, the courthouse doors, the staircase, the two hundred chairs. The chapter is an inventory—complete, accurate, and inert. Nothing is at stake, no one changes, and the reader has no question to hold from one commission to the next; even the fuel runs rich here, facts stacked past the point of ignition. Somewhere in this list is the apprentice who left mid-project and never came back—one buried sentence that contains more book than the fifteen years around it.

*"That was also the spring Daniel left, and the staircase took four months instead of two."*

A STORY-SIZED WOUND FILED AS A SCHEDULING NOTE—THE CHAPTER'S ENGINE, MENTIONED IN PASSING.

- **Cut the inventory; build the absence.** Daniel's departure is the only event in these fifteen years that changed the builder. Make it the chapter: what happened, what it cost, what the empty bench did to the work. The commissions become backdrop in a paragraph.
- **Save the catalog for the appendix.** The full list of commissions is legitimate material—as an appendix a proud reader can browse, not as the chapter's spine.

STRUCTURE: FRAMED — OPENS AT THE DESTINATION

Fa

FI

Me

Em

Dr

Ac

The chapter attempts a framed opening—we made it, and here's how—then recounts the crisis year as a sequence of measures taken: the second mortgage, the Saturday hours, the price cut that saved the courthouse contract. Because the outcome and the method are both announced up front, the middle can only itemize. The frame never pays for itself: when the story returns to the opening scene, the reader sees the same scene, not a changed one. The raw material—one specific Saturday, the daughter's recital missed for a delivery—is strong enough to carry a chapter that trusts it.

*“We were open on Saturdays because I couldn't afford to be closed on Saturdays.”*

THE ONE LINE THAT RENDERS THE COST AS LIVED EXPERIENCE—THE SENTENCE THE WHOLE CHAPTER SHOULD BE BUILT FROM.

- **Withhold the survival.** Open inside the worst month with the outcome genuinely uncertain—the reader knows the shop exists today only if the jacket told them. Let the measures arrive as gambles, not as a recipe that already worked.
- **Spend one full Saturday on the page.** Replace the montage of sacrifices with a single Saturday, hour by hour, recital program on the workbench. One lived day outweighs a summarized year.

Chapter 6 — *The Foreman's Notebook*

STRUCTURE: THEMATIC, NOT CHRONOLOGICAL

RUNNING

Fa

FI

Me

Em

Dr

Ac

Built around entries from a retired foreman's pocket notebook—dates, initials, one-line judgments—and the found-document structure gives the chapter a texture nothing else in the book has. The entries are curated with discipline and the reader is trusted to assemble the man from his marginalia; this is the manuscript's structure working. It stops one step short: the chapter displays the practice without handing it over, and the reader closes it admiring a notebook they were never invited to start.

*“3/14 — R.T. stayed late to fix J.'s miter. Didn't tell J. Remember this at review time.”*

FACTS RUNNING LEAN AND SPECIFIC—ONE NOTEBOOK LINE CARRYING CHARACTER, CULTURE, AND METHOD AT ONCE.

- **Hand the notebook to the reader.** Close with the three entries the author wrote about his own crew last week. The jump from artifact to practice is one paragraph—and it converts a museum piece into a tool.

COMIC INTERLUDE · JUDGED ON EMOTION      STRUCTURE: THEMATIC, NOT CHRONOLOGICAL

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| Fa | Fi | Me | Em | Dr | Ac |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|

A two-thousand-word taxonomy of splinters—by wood species, by extraction method, by the dignity of the sound the sufferer makes—placed exactly where the manuscript needs to exhale. It is doing one job, on purpose, and doing it: the reader laughs, resets, and arrives at the arithmetic chapter with attention to spend. Judged on what it attempts, it lands.

*“Oak announces itself. Pine apologizes on the way in. Purpleheart waits until you’ve told everyone it didn’t hurt.”*

COMIC TIMING BUILT ON REVEAL AND REFRAME—CRAFT CONSISTENT EVEN AT PLAY.

→ **Keep it exactly this length.** The interlude works because it leaves before the joke does. Resist the temptation to grow it in revision.

Chapter 8 — *The Arithmetic of Apprenticeship*

LOGICAL PROOF · JUDGED ON FACTS, DRIVE      STRUCTURE: CONCLUSION-FIRST

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Fa | Fi | Me | Em | Dr | Ac |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|

The evidence chapter, and it declares itself as one: the conclusion—training your replacement returns more than it costs—stated in the first paragraph, then earned through shop ledgers, turnover numbers, and a competitor’s collapse. The conclusion-first structure is right for this material, and here the announced destination clicks into place behind the reader the way the narrative chapters never manage. The numbers prove the case at one shop’s scale; a second worked example at a different size would let a skeptical reader find their own operation in the math.

*“Every apprentice I trained cost me eleven months. Every one I didn’t cost me three years.”*

THE WHOLE ARGUMENT IN RATIO FORM—EVIDENCE AS DEMONSTRATION, NOT ASSERTION.

→ **Run the numbers once at someone else’s scale.** A one-page version of the same arithmetic for a twelve-person firm closes the it-only-works-for-him door before the reader opens it.

STRUCTURE: FRAMED — OPENS AT THE DESTINATION

|    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Fa | FI | Me | Em | Dr | Ac |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|

The closing chapter opens with the author locking the shop for the last time, builds back through the succession—the plane his grandfather never handed over, finally handed over—and the return to the locked door reads differently the second time: not an ending but a handoff. The final pages turn to the reader directly and the ask is specific: name your successor by Friday, hand over one tool you've been protecting, stay out of the room while they use it. This is the manuscript's engine assembled and running—and the proof that the author can build a chapter when he stops filing and starts constructing.

*“The plane was never mine. It was only my turn.”*

THE BOOK'S CLAIM COMPRESSED TO NINE WORDS—THE SENTENCE A READER REPEATS TO SOMEONE ELSE A WEEK LATER.

→ **Cut the penultimate summary paragraph.** The handoff scene has already made the case; the recap between it and the final ask is the one place this chapter explains itself.

Every chapter has a relatively weakest stage. When the *same* stage keeps coming up weakest across a whole manuscript, that repetition is the pattern you can't see from inside any single chapter — your signature blind spot.

THE PATTERN ACROSS YOUR CHAPTERS

FLOW · THE CHRONICLE

## You wrote the record of the years—the reader needed the story inside them.

The same structure repeats from the opening chapter to the recession chapter, which makes it a signature rather than a slip: state the lesson, then present the past in the order it happened. Chapter 1 announces its claim in the first paragraph and spends a decade agreeing with it. Chapter 2 files nine rules while the grandfather who forged them stays a summary. Chapter 4 inventories fifteen years and buries the one event that changed the builder—Daniel's departure—in a scheduling note. Chapter 5 announces the survival and the method before the reader has spent one uncertain hour in the crisis. This is the habit of a maker who keeps immaculate records: the ledger is true, but a ledger is a fact, not a story. The counter-evidence is the closing chapter, where the same author withholds a turn, builds toward it, and earns an ask—proof the blind spot is a habit, not a ceiling. Rebuild three chapters on that chapter's pattern and the whole engine changes state.

# The Three Highest-Leverage Repairs

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In priority order. Fix the first and the rest get easier — each is drawn from material already in your manuscript.

1

## Rebuild three chapters as stories with withheld turns.

The \$11,000 mistake, Daniel's departure, and one recession Saturday are complete narratives waiting inside their chapters. Open inside each event with the outcome uncertain, let the reader spend the cost, and hold each lesson until its story has earned it—the way the closing chapter already does.

*Where it lands: Chapters 1, 4, 5*

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2

## Move every stated lesson from the first page to the last.

The chronicle habit begins at each chapter's opening line. Relocating the claim to the close —after its evidence has happened to the reader—converts confirmation into discovery across the whole manuscript without cutting a single fact.

*Where it lands: Chapters 1, 2, 5*

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3

## Give every lesson its Monday move.

The transmission is where this book loses its reader: the scenes produce feeling and the chapters end without a first step. One small, repeatable action per teaching chapter—the entry to write tonight, the tool to hand over this week, the room to leave—converts what the reader feels into something they rehearse. The closing chapter already does this, with a name and a deadline; hold the other chapters to it.

*Where it lands: Chapters 2, 3, 6*

# Does the Book Hold Together?

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Three checks a manuscript has to pass that no single chapter can answer alone.

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## **Does the opening plant the question the ending answers?**

The opening chapter plants a claim, not a question, and the closing chapter answers a question the opening never asked. The handed-over plane deserves a planted counterpart in chapter one—the plane not yet handed over.

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## **Is there a story of a failure that changed someone — the kind that gives the reader permission?**

Daniel's departure is the book's failed-goal story—the loss that plainly changed the builder—and it currently occupies one sentence of an inventory chapter. Built out, it gives readers the permission the rules alone can't.

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## **Is your own stake in this material visible to the reader?**

The stake is visible and real: a family trade, a second mortgage, a succession. The book never has to manufacture why this matters to the man writing it.

# What Does the Reader Want to Do?

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## THE ONLY TEST THAT MATTERS

Ask a reader today what they want to do when they close this book and the honest answer is: tell someone about the man—the ledger, the rocking chair, the plane. That is feeling, and it is real. It is not yet motion. After the closing chapter, for thirty pages, the answer becomes: hand something over. The revision's whole job is to move that second answer forward into the body of the book, so the feeling the scenes already produce has somewhere to go while it is still warm.

## Where to Take It From Here

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If you want a partner for that rebuild—working the engine chapter by chapter until every lesson lands as a discovery instead of a record—that is the work we do with authors every day. The paths below are where it goes deeper.

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### LEARN THE METHOD

#### The Conviction Engine Course

The full framework, self-paced — the formulas behind each stage and how to build them into a manuscript from the first draft.

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### DO IT LIVE

#### The Live Cohort

Work the engine on your own pages alongside a small group, with live teardowns and direct feedback from Platte.

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### WORK WITH PLATTE

#### One-on-One Coaching

Execute this report's repairs on your manuscript together — hands-on, chapter by chapter, until the engine fires end to end.

## A misfire with racing fuel *is an engine one rebuild away from running.*

Hold onto what this diagnosis is not: it is not a verdict on the material, the honesty, or the writing hand. The fuel in this manuscript is the kind most authors have to borrow, and the closing chapter proves the author can build with it. The misfire lives in one repeated structural habit—the chronicle—and a habit, unlike a talent, can be replaced on a schedule.

The path is concrete: three chapters rebuilt as stories, every lesson moved to the end of its evidence, one person and one Monday move per teaching chapter. Do that and the stages downstream—meaning, feeling, movement—fire on the fuel that has been waiting for them since page one. The engine in these pages is learnable, and this report is the map of where it already runs.

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Platte F. Clark

STRAW DOGS DEVELOPMENT

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## About Platte F. Clark

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AT THE LIONSGATE PREMIERE  
OF *THE BEST CHRISTMAS  
PAGEANT EVER* — 2024

Platte F. Clark has spent his career inside other people's books — the ghostwriter behind more than thirty nonfiction titles for executives, founders, and category-defining experts (including much of the modern FranklinCovey leadership shelf), the novelist behind the *Bad Unicorn* trilogy at Aladdin / Simon & Schuster (250,000+ copies sold internationally), and the credited screenwriter on Lionsgate's *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* (92% critics, 97% audiences; Top 40 box office, 2024).

Before ghostwriting full-time, he built behavioral curriculum for FranklinCovey, VitalSmarts, and ZengerFolkman, and served as Chief Learning Officer for a training company partnered with Tony Robbins — the instructional-design background under this report's architecture.

He leads Straw Dogs Development, hosts the *Author Unknown* podcast, and is an active WGA member. This report applies the Conviction Engine™, the framework taught in full in his book *The Conviction Engine: The Six Stages for Building Stories That Move People*.



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