

The Physician's Bootstrap Playbook

Start a Business on \$0 Budget — While Still Practicing Medicine

Why Physicians Make Terrible (and Great) Entrepreneurs

Terrible because: you've been trained to be risk-averse, you're used to a salary, and you think "starting a business" means raising venture capital and quitting your job.

Great because: you solve complex problems daily, you have domain expertise that's nearly impossible to replicate, you have a professional network worth millions, and you already work 80-hour weeks — so you know how to grind.

This playbook is for the physician who wants to start something on the side, with zero upfront capital, while keeping their clinical income. No MBA required. No investors needed. Just your brain, your expertise, and a few hours per week.

The Bootstrap Rule: Don't spend money until you've validated demand. Don't quit your job until the business replaces your income. Don't build a product until someone has paid you for the service version first.

The 7 Zero-Cost Business Models for Physicians

| Model | Examples | Time to Revenue | Income Potential |
|---------------------------|--|-----------------|-------------------|
| Expert Content | Newsletter, podcast, YouTube | 3–6 months | \$1K–50K/mo |
| Consulting | Medtech advisory, legal expert witness | 1–4 weeks | \$200–800/hr |
| Digital Course | Board review, CME, patient ed | 2–4 months | \$5K–100K/launch |
| Micro-SaaS | Clinical calculators, templates, workflows | 3–8 months | \$2K–30K/mo |
| Coaching/Mentoring | Career, burnout, transition | 1–2 weeks | \$150–500/session |
| Community | Paid Slack/Discord for niche specialty | 2–6 months | \$3K–20K/mo |
| Locums Arbitrage | Own locums agency for your specialty | 1–3 months | \$5K–40K/mo |

The 6-Week Launch Framework

WEEK 1 — FIND YOUR WEDGE

Identify the problem you solve better than anyone else

Your "wedge" is the intersection of: (1) a problem you see every day, (2) expertise you already have, and (3) someone willing to pay for a solution. Don't invent a problem. Notice one.

Exercise: Write down 10 frustrations from your last month of practice. Not clinical frustrations — workflow, system, knowledge, and access frustrations. Which one would people pay to solve?

- "I wish there was a better way to explain X to patients"
- "Why doesn't anyone teach residents Y?"
- "Every time I look up Z, the information is scattered"

WEEK 2 — VALIDATE WITH CONVERSATIONS

Talk to 10 potential customers before building anything

DM 10 colleagues or potential customers. Don't pitch — ask. "I'm thinking about creating X. Would that be useful to you? What would make it essential?"

Validation signals:

- "Oh my god, I need that yesterday" (strong signal)
- "I'd pay for that" (moderate — people overestimate willingness to pay)
- "Can I beta test it?" (strongest signal — they're investing time)
- "That's interesting" (polite rejection)
- "Send me the link when it's ready" (they won't buy)

WEEK 3 — BUILD THE MVP (MINIMUM VIABLE PRODUCT)

The ugliest version that delivers value

Your MVP is NOT an app. It's not a website. It's the fastest possible way to deliver the value.

| Business Type | MVP (Don't Build This) | MVP (Build This Instead) |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Course | Polished video platform | 3 live Zoom sessions, \$50 each |
| Newsletter | Custom website + email system | Free Substack + 5 posts |
| Consulting | Professional website + booking system | LinkedIn post + Calendly link |
| Community | Custom app | Free Slack/Discord + 20 invites |
| Template/Tool | SaaS platform | Google Sheet + Loom walkthrough |

WEEK 4 – GET YOUR FIRST DOLLAR

Revenue before polish. Always.

Price it. Charge for it. Even \$10. The gap between free and \$1 is infinite. The gap between \$1 and \$100 is marketing.

Pricing framework for physicians: Start at 50% of what you think it's worth. Raise prices every 5 customers until people push back. If no one pushes back, you're still too cheap.

WEEK 5 – BUILD IN PUBLIC

Your journey IS the marketing

Share what you're building on Twitter/X, LinkedIn, or a specialty-specific forum. Physicians building businesses is inherently interesting to other physicians. Document the process:

- "Week 1: I had this idea. Here's the problem I'm solving."
- "Week 3: Built the MVP. Here's what 10 beta users said."
- "Week 5: Made my first \$500. Here's what I learned."

This simultaneously builds your audience, validates your idea, and creates accountability.

WEEK 6 – SYSTEMATIZE OR KILL

Does this deserve your next 6 months?

After 6 weeks, you have data. Answer honestly:

- Did anyone pay? How many?
- Did customers come back or refer others?
- Can you deliver this in ≤ 5 hours/week alongside clinical work?
- Does this energize you or drain you?

If yes to all: systematize. Set up recurring processes, automate what you can, and commit to 6 more months.

If no: kill it. You lost nothing but time, and you gained invaluable experience.

The Zero-Cost Tech Stack

| Need | Free Tool | Upgrade When... |
|------------|------------------------|---|
| Website | Carrd.co (free tier) | You need SEO (→ WordPress) |
| Email list | Substack or Buttondown | You need automation (→ ConvertKit) |
| Payments | Stripe + Gumroad | You need subscriptions (→ Stripe Billing) |

| | | |
|------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Scheduling | Calendly (free tier) | You need team scheduling |
| Community | Discord or Slack (free) | You need courses + community (→ Circle) |
| Legal | Stripe Atlas (\$500, but worth it) | N/A — do this early |
| Design | Canva (free tier) | You need brand consistency |
| Video | Loom (free tier) + YouTube | You need course hosting (→ Teachable) |

⚠ Legal Must-Knows: Form an LLC before accepting payments (\$50–500 depending on state). Separate business banking from personal. Check your employment contract for moonlighting/IP clauses. If you're creating medical content, add disclaimers. Consider malpractice tail coverage implications.

Time Management: The 5-Hour Physician Entrepreneur

The Weekly 5-Hour Block

You don't need 40 hours. You need 5 focused hours, consistently:

- **Monday (1 hr):** Plan the week. What's the ONE thing that moves the business forward?
- **Wednesday (2 hrs):** Deep work block. Create content, build product, serve customers.
- **Friday (1 hr):** Marketing. One post, one outreach, one relationship.
- **Sunday (1 hr):** Admin. Respond to customers, review metrics, plan next week.

Protect these blocks like OR time. They're non-negotiable.

The Physician's Unfair Advantages

1. **Credibility.** "Dr." in front of your name means people trust you instantly. Use this ethically.
2. **Network.** Your residency classmates are now attendings at every major hospital. Your professional network is worth more than any VC funding.
3. **Problem awareness.** You SEE the problems every day. Non-physician entrepreneurs have to guess.
4. **Financial runway.** Your clinical income is your funding. You don't need investors — you need nights and weekends.
5. **Risk tolerance training.** You make life-and-death decisions daily. A failed Substack isn't going to break you.

Your Launch Checklist

- Identified my "wedge" — the problem I solve better than anyone
- Talked to 10 potential customers (not friends/family)
- Chosen a business model from the 7 options above
- Built the ugliest possible MVP
- Made my first dollar
- Set up my 5-hour weekly blocks
- Formed an LLC and opened business banking
- Told at least 5 people what I'm building

- Committed to 6 months before evaluating success/failure

Ready to go deeper? Visit bootstrap-business-school.wedgekit.com for case studies of physician entrepreneurs, live workshops, and a community of doctors building businesses alongside their clinical practice.

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