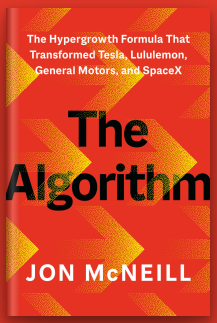
The Hypergrowth Formula That Transformed Tesla, Lululemon, General Motors, and SpaceX

The Algorithm

JON McNEILL with Stephen Baker · Portfolio, 2026

"Question the status quo."

McNeill was Tesla's president (2015–2018), when revenue went from $2B to $20B. He learned five steps from Musk, *"the architect of the Algorithm"*, but says the breakthroughs mostly came from the people it freed up: *"No enterprise needs Elon Musk for that."*



PART I · THE FIVE STEPS, IN THIS ORDER

STEP 1 — Question every requirement

Many "requirements" are really *"recommendations, customs, or conventions"*. Obey the laws of physics, but ask for the data behind everything else.

Tesla: Doug Field rolled a Matchbox car across the table. Why weld some three hundred chassis parts when you could cast them?

"Any requirement that is applicable to everyone must be questioned."

STEP 2 — Delete every possible step

List every step and circle the ones the customer pays for. Cut the rest. Going too far is fine: *"Maybe 10 percent of the steps actually need to be reinstated."*

Tesla: online buying went from 64 clicks to 12. Online sales rose twentyfold in ten months.

"Time kills deals."

STEP 3 — Simplify and optimize

"I call it innovation by subtraction." Hide the steps you can't remove behind the scenes, then practise until the process is fast and repeatable.

Tesla: preparing a car for delivery fell from five to six hours to four minutes.

"Simplification is a sneaky enabler."

STEP 4 — Accelerate cycle time

Speed up only once quality is right. Compare hands-on "touch time" with total cycle time: the gap is your opportunity. Use a small team with a top executive clearing roadblocks.

Tesla: 14 days to under 6.
Lululemon: an Olympic kit in four months, not eighteen.

"Going fast is a simple hack for growth."

STEP 5 — Automate last

Robots or software come only after you know the process by hand. Run it on Excel and Google Forms first.

Tesla: when the Model 3 robots failed, a hand-built line in a tent went from 75 to 750 cars a week in six weeks.

"Don't automate until you know exactly what you're doing"

PART II · THREE CULTURAL INGREDIENTS THAT SUPPLEMENT THE ALGORITHM

1 Expand the product to the customer's entire experience

Tesla had five thousand test drivers who never got a callback, because salespeople were paid for leads, not sales. McNeill halted test drives until every one was called. *"Within days, sales spiked."* Tesla also went into car insurance.

2 Inject urgency and accountability to the CEO

The **weekly cadence**: every Tuesday, engineers reported to Musk on *"the two or three most pressing problems." "What's important is the energetic participation of the CEO—and the accountability that this person demands."*

3 Eat your own dog food

Use your product as a customer would. Ask staff: *"If you were running this company, what would you change?" "Anytime a customer needs YouTube to find a switch or understand how something works, the design needs a tweak."* At Lululemon he and president Celeste Burgoyne secret-shop each other's stores; after one visit she fixed his three findings within twenty-four hours.

What it did at Tesla

$2B → $20B Tesla revenue in his time	**25x** production scale-up after Model 3: 20,000 cars a quarter to half a million
18 days of cash left at the worst point	**100%** foreign-owned: Gigafactory Shanghai

At GM, a small Hummer EV team got its first truck off the line *"barely nineteen months"* after launch. At Lululemon, home delivery went from two days to two hours using stores.

Tesla's own build time had been *"almost three times as long"* as Toyota's five days.

GUIDANCE · USE IT MONDAY

- Pick one process. List every step; circle what the customer pays for.
- Ask the owner of each rule: law, or just habit? Show me the data.
- Cut hard, then add back the few steps you truly need.
- Explain the process to an imaginary robot that knows nothing.
- Measure touch time against cycle time.
- Run it by hand before buying software.
- Hold a weekly problem session with the CEO in the details.
- Hire *"simplifiers"*: *"Simplifiers are accelerators."*

McNeill's caveats

- *"But this is not a book about Elon."* He says Musk has *"glaring blind spots"*, and that his zeal can blind him to the value of some regulations.
- Deleting steps can be *"painful, and even counterproductive"*.
- Skipping the learning step with the factory robots: *"we face-planted on it."*
- Hourly progress emails took accountability *"a bit too far."*
- Autonomous driving has for years missed Musk's promises.
- There's no SpaceX case study, despite the subtitle.

"Last year's advances are this year's norms." — JON McNEILL