



Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative

BRIDGING the gap between **THEORY** and **PRACTICE** in entrepreneurship

Includes:

- A structured, in-depth article: 'Empowering the Future of Entrepreneurship'
- A section featuring advice from 100+ Global Experts

About Our Initiative

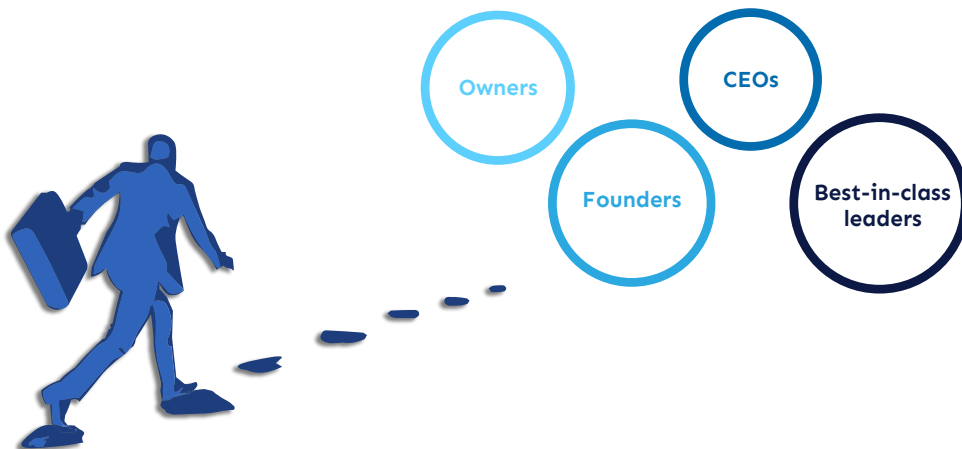
Entrepreneurship is a unique and often challenging journey, where theory alone can only get you so far. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all rulebook to follow, as each journey is different and comes with its own risks, opportunities and rewards.

That's why, each year, our initiative brings together insights from over 100 global experts. We believe the best way to get accurate information, backed by real-life knowledge and experience is to go directly to the source (to those who've been through the journey themselves).

For that reason, **we ask each participant a simple yet powerful question:**

"What advice would you give yourself if you were starting your entrepreneurial journey all over again, armed with the knowledge and experiences you have today?"

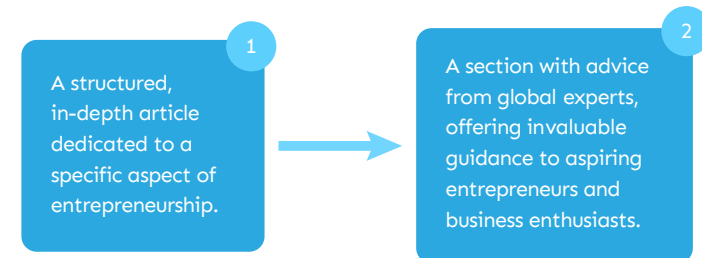
Initiative participants come from all stages of the entrepreneurial journey, bringing a mix of roles, industries, and backgrounds, creating a truly diverse and dynamic group.



Our Dual Approach

The initiative was born out of a desire to bridge the gap between theory and practice. To achieve this, we use a dual approach: combining in-depth articles on current trends with insights from over 100 global experts. Together, these create a well-rounded **resource to support individuals** on their entrepreneurial journey.

Each brochure features:



Initiative Results

While our annual brochure is a key result of the IEJ Initiative, it's just the beginning. The insights we gather lay the **foundation for a variety of educational resources** we create with the help of universities, startup incubators and other institutions, as well as individual contributors.

Examples of resources we create:

- Leadership blueprints
- Startup guides
- Entrepreneurship frameworks
- Whitepapers
- Research reports
- Online courses
- Case studies and success stories
- Practical toolkits

Initiative Origins

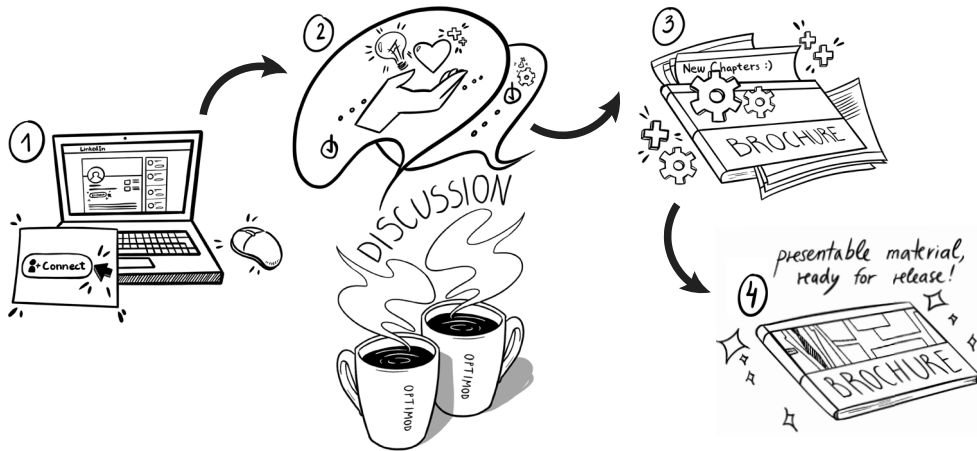
In 2021, we discovered LinkedIn's potential to connect with global experts and gain valuable real-world advice and insights. After some time, we started sharing these insights through blog posts.

By September 2022, those posts grew into a project called "Challenges of the Entrepreneurial World," which quickly gained support from the community.

Building on that momentum, we created a full brochure in December 2022.

The positive feedback encouraged us to officially launch the Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative (IEJI) in February 2023.

Now, our annual brochure is a direct result of IEJI – a resource we're excited to keep sharing for years to come.



Author & Purpose



Sara Kremsar
Founder of OPTIMOD
Initiative Creator & Author

There's no magic way to be fully prepared for what's ahead. So, we try to do the next best thing, which is to get advice straight from people who have walked this path.

Whether you're an experienced entrepreneur, just starting out, or simply curious about entrepreneurship, this brochure offers:

- Real-world insights and advice
- Fresh ideas and new perspectives
- Lessons from others' stories and experiences
- Updates on current entrepreneurial trends.

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Topic Introduction

Overview of the brochure's topic

1.0

Topic Introduction

1.0

Overview of the brochure's topic

Here we are, in the third year of our **Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative**! It is inspiring to reflect on how far we have come and the progress we have made together. Back in 2022, with **Brochure Vol. 1**, we began this journey by exploring the theme '**Embarking on the Entrepreneurial Journey**.' That first edition was all about those early steps, navigating the uncertainties of starting out and finding your place in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Then came 2023, with **Brochure Vol. 2**, where we built on that foundation with the theme '**Elevating Entrepreneurial Potential**.' This second edition shifted gears toward growth. It was about helping entrepreneurs expand their horizons by focusing on strategic vision, leadership, innovation, and embracing a mindset that fuels resilience and sustained success. These themes encouraged entrepreneurs to push boundaries, embrace diversity, and explore new ways to innovate while staying aligned with their goals.

In these first two years, we explored foundational steps and strategies for growth. Now, in 2024, we are excited to explore what it means to take ownership of the future. With **Brochure Vol. 3**, where the theme '**Empowering the Future of Entrepreneurship**', explored through three topics, feels like the natural next step.

This year is about helping entrepreneurs look ahead, focus on what matters most, and build ventures that can adapt and thrive no matter what comes their way. It's about moving beyond adaptation to actively shaping the future by embracing forward-thinking strategies, creating purpose-driven businesses, and building resilient, impactful ecosystems.

Over these three years, this initiative has grown alongside you, reflecting the journey so many entrepreneurs experience, from the first steps to moments of growth and now to finding the confidence to shape the future. Each chapter is part of that journey, one that continues to inspire and challenge us all.

We know the entrepreneurial journey is full of unexpected twists and turns, and theory alone often falls short of capturing that reality. That's why, through our initiative, **we reach out to over 100 global experts each year to hear their thoughts and experiences**. Their advice isn't about abstract concepts but about practical, grounded strategies that bridge the gap between theory and practice, which is the main purpose of our IEJI (Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative).

You will find their insights in section 3.0 '**Advice from Global Experts**,' shared with the hope that they provide something truly useful as you navigate your own path towards optimum success.

Article Overview

2.0

Article on the topic of 'Empowering the Future of Entrepreneurship', divided into 3 chapters

Modern Entrepreneurial Landscape

2.1

First Chapter



The world of entrepreneurship is changing every day, bringing new challenges but also incredible opportunities. Today's entrepreneurial landscape is rich with potential for those ready to embrace it. For entrepreneurs, this moment is about keeping up with these changes and stepping forward to innovate, inspire, and make a lasting impact.

This chapter explores what it takes to thrive in this ever-evolving entrepreneurial world. From embracing the shift to digital-first economies, where technology drives growth and opens doors, to putting customers at the heart of every decision, the potential is vast. We also delve into how entrepreneurs can identify and seize opportunities in a world that is constantly changing, transforming uncertainty into a platform for growth by taking control, creating something meaningful, and shaping the future of business on their own terms, even within this pre-laid modern landscape.

The Shift Towards Digital-First

First Chapter – Subchapter 1/3

2.1.1

Many of you will remember what it was like to live in a time when digital technology was hard to come by and may be fascinated by how far we, as a society, have come. Others reading this, however, may not recall a time without technology and are equally fascinated by how people managed without it. In both cases, the word “fascinated” comes to mind.

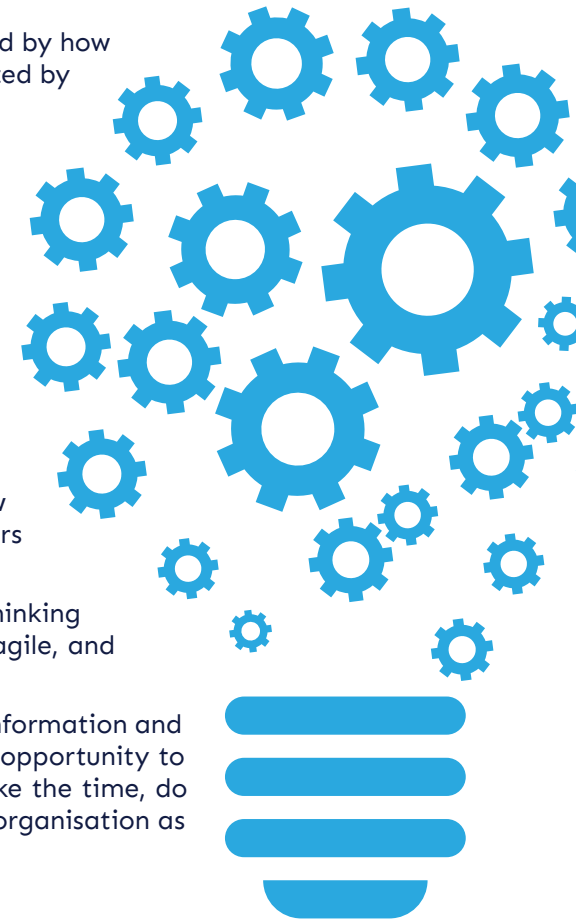
Technology truly fascinates us, touching every aspect of our lives, and entrepreneurship is no exception.

The world we live in today is undeniably supported by digital technology in every aspect. This shift towards digital-first economies is not just a trend but represents a fundamental change in how businesses operate and grow. However, for this transformation to succeed, it is necessary to adopt a digital-first mindset. Of course, that is easier said than done, especially since adopting this mindset often brings about change (whether expected or unexpected, desired or not).

More often than not, these changes are for the better. We may not immediately notice their positive impact, but over time, they become clear. Digital approaches are reshaping industries, creating opportunities to reach audiences in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Businesses are no longer tied to a physical space or limited by geography. Entrepreneurs now have access to tools that allow them to operate globally, streamline processes, and better understand the needs of their customers ... and all of this, with just a few clicks.

But is this shift really only about adopting the latest technology and applying it to our processes? Absolutely not! It is about rethinking how businesses approach their goals, relationships, and growth. A digital-first strategy means embracing innovation, staying agile, and recognising that success often lies in how quickly you can adapt to change.

So, for anyone just starting out or for entrepreneurs already navigating this digital landscape, the challenge is keeping up with information and trends and **using technology in meaningful ways that support their vision and, most importantly, their values.** It is truly an opportunity to build businesses that are smarter, more connected, and better equipped to thrive in an ever-evolving world, as long as you take the time, do your research, and adapt what aligns best with your goals and principles (not only as an individual/entrepreneur but also as an organisation as a whole, including your customers, partners, and processes).



Customers at the Heart of Business

2.1.2

First Chapter – Subchapter 2/3

Just as technology becomes the backbone of nearly every aspect of business, the core of every successful business lies in its customers. They are the driving force behind our existence. **It's a simple, yet sometimes bittersweet truth: customers drive everything.** No matter how innovative your product or service is or how advanced your technology may be, without truly understanding and meeting the needs of your customers, success will always remain just out of reach.

This is why it is especially important to stay aware, particularly in today's digital age. Often, we see businesses heavily relying on technology to support processes at every step, which is fantastic, until automation takes over those key touchpoints where human connection is critical. Automation that is pushed to the extreme, where reaching a real person becomes nearly impossible, can turn what should be a seamless experience into a frustrating one.

We are seeing a rise in this kind of business model, especially when young entrepreneurs are flooding the market with innovative services, making it harder and harder to stand out. **But instead of letting this discourage you, let it drive and motivate you.** This competitive landscape should be a reminder of the importance of what truly sets businesses apart, which is how they connect with their customers.

Customers don't want to feel like a transaction but want to feel understood and valued.

So, what does this mean for you? Putting customers at the heart of your business is about offering a great product or service, building trust, creating value, and forming genuine connections. Today, expectations evolve as fast as trends. Being customer-centric means listening, adapting, and personalising every step of the journey to meet individual needs. That's why prioritising empathy, authenticity, and consistent engagement helps your business stand out and earn long-term loyalty.

But just like adapting to technology, this isn't something you do occasionally or through a single strategy. It requires a complete mindset shift. **You should continuously look beyond just the numbers and data to truly see the people behind them.** It means understanding their needs, their desires, and knowing how to interact with them in meaningful ways. So, in other words, you should make customers feel like they are at the center of it all. Did that make sense while reading it? Well, it might make sense, but it's not enough! Instead of making them feel, you should ensure that they actually are at the center of everything you do.

So, instead of creating a feeling of illusion, work on realistic actions that will make your organisation genuinely customer-centric.

Navigating Opportunities in a Dynamic World

2.1.3

First Chapter – Subchapter 3/3

While considering this subchapter's title, it was hard to decide whether to use "Dynamic World." Is it overused? Should it be worded differently? But the truth is, we really do live in a dynamic world. Whether it's paradigm shifts, emerging trends, rapid technological advancements, or other internal or external factors, **there's always something that makes our world shake a little.**

But wait, this sounds pretty scary, doesn't it? Constant change, an always-transforming environment, and never being sure of what tomorrow holds can feel daunting. Some of you might agree with that, while others might not. And that right there shows how different perspectives on a situation can lead to different outcomes.

It's impossible to know exactly what the future will bring or fully understand everything happening around us.

Just in the past few years, we've seen several major shifts transforming how businesses operate:

- **Technological advancements**, like artificial intelligence and machine learning, are automating processes and driving digital transformation.
- The rise of the **creator economy** has empowered individuals to monetise their skills through platforms like YouTube and TikTok.
- **Globalisation** is more complex than ever, with businesses diversifying supply chains to adapt to geopolitical tensions and disruptions.
- **Sustainability** has become a key focus, with companies and governments pushing for reduced carbon footprints and renewable energy.
- The **gig economy** is reshaping work, while **social movements** for gender equality and diversity influence policies worldwide.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** has heightened health and wellness awareness, leading to greater demand for mental health services and telemedicine.

The best thing you can do is make sure you're surrounded by reliable sources of information, stay on top of trends and technologies, and pinpoint key risk areas. Then, implement processes that allow you to continuously monitor those areas, not just every once in a blue moon. Recognise potential opportunities, assess and prioritise them, innovate, and then implement. **And most importantly, don't panic.**

When something unexpected comes your way, which might not align with your plans, don't treat it negatively. Instead, shift your mindset and see it as an opportunity. Of course, that doesn't mean you should act on every opportunity. But it's important to recognise that the world we live in today is fast-paced, constantly changing, and full of opportunities (especially if you know where to look).

Purpose-Driven Entrepreneurship

Second Chapter

2.2



Every company has its own unique story; a story on why it was created, how it all began, and what it is trying to achieve. Often, a company's purpose isn't just about finances or profits. Instead, it's about using business as a force for good, creating something meaningful, and making a real difference in the world. More and more, we're seeing entrepreneurs step up to the challenge of addressing some of the most pressing social and environmental issues of our time. Therefore, we could say that purpose-driven entrepreneurship is all about aligning your business with a higher mission that contributes positively to society and the environment.

This chapter explores how entrepreneurs can build businesses that leave a lasting social footprint. We start by looking at how to create businesses with a positive social impact, then dive into how sustainability can be integrated into your business model for long-term success. Finally, we challenge the traditional definition of success by exploring how to measure it beyond just financials, considering factors like social value, environmental impact, and personal fulfilment. This chapter is for those who want to make a difference while building a thriving business, where purpose and profit go hand in hand and where the hardest question you'll be asked is, "What kind of legacy do you want your business to leave behind?"

Building Businesses with a Positive Social Impact

2.2.1

Second Chapter – Subchapter 1/3

“Entrepreneurs are the ones who will change the world!” – Ever heard that statement or at least something similar? It’s a bold claim, but there’s truth to it. Entrepreneurs often feel immense pressure coming from all sides. But this chapter isn’t about pressure or hardship. It’s about building businesses that are not just competitive and successful in the long run but also truly meaningful and socially impactful.

A company can’t operate in isolation, and today no business can afford to be indifferent to society.

Just as every individual has responsibilities towards their community, businesses also have obligations to the societies in which they operate. Today’s market forces wield incredible power in driving positive social change, making Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) an essential part of modern businesses’ operations. **We all have a part to play in making the world a better place, and businesses are no exception.**

Think about it this way: people admire and respect those who act responsibly, and the same is true for businesses. We could say that an unwritten, implied contract exists between companies and society, granting businesses the freedom to operate in exchange for acting in the best interests of their communities and environments. It’s a mutual relationship built on give-and-take, where both sides thrive when businesses prioritise responsibility and positive impact. Now, that being said, companies often do feel pressure connected to this, especially since ignoring ethics or skipping out on social responsibilities can seriously damage their reputation ... and once that’s gone, it’s hard to get back. But isn’t it sad that we need regulations to support this cause? Does it really have to come down to enforcing it through rules?

Not necessarily. Regulations are helpful, but building a business with a positive social impact should go beyond compliance. The key idea is that doing good isn’t just about being generous or kind. **You should care, and genuinely care about doing the right thing.** This can mean operating ethically, supporting meaningful social causes, or adopting environmentally friendly practices. Sure, doing the right thing might cost more upfront, but in the long run, it pays off. It helps you build loyal customers who share your values and trust your brand, enhance your company’s reputation, and foster trust with stakeholders, including customers, employees, and investors.

Here’s the thing: building a socially impactful business doesn’t require tackling massive global issues overnight. **Sometimes, it’s the small actions that create the biggest ripple effects.** Simple changes like sourcing materials ethically, reducing waste, or supporting local communities can add up to something much larger over time. What truly matters is staying authentic to your mission and being open to adapting as needs evolve.

When a business operates with purpose and integrity, it leaves a lasting, positive legacy. And isn’t that the ultimate goal? To create something that succeeds today and also contributes to a better tomorrow. **So, the question remains: What legacy do you want your business to leave behind?**



Incorporating Sustainability in Business Models

2.2.2

Second Chapter – Subchapter 2/3

Continuing our focus on what kind of legacy you want your business to leave behind, we naturally arrive at another important topic: **sustainability**. Acting responsibly towards society and the environment goes hand in hand, and for businesses that genuinely want to make a difference, integrating sustainability into their daily operations is quite essential. After all, how can a business create meaningful change if it neglects the very foundation of its existence: the planet we all share?

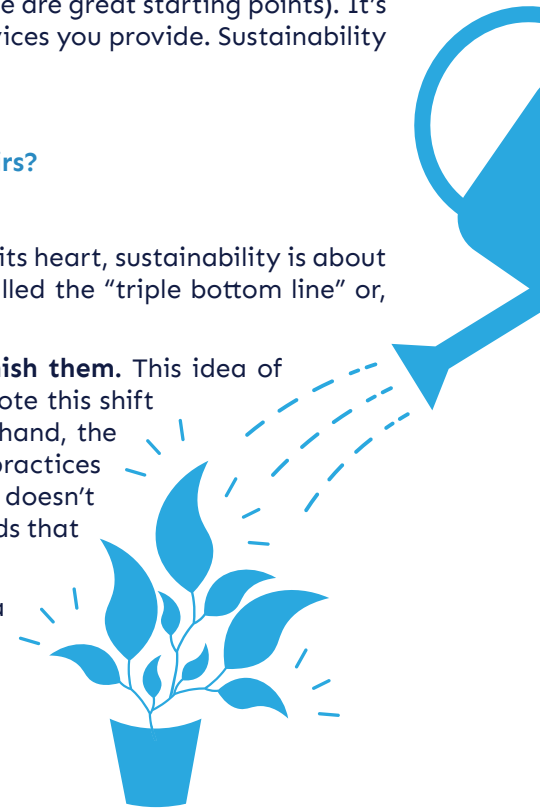
But you should realise that sustainability isn't just about making eco-friendly gestures like recycling or reducing waste (although those are great starting points). It's about stepping back and rethinking how your business operates, everything from the resources you consume to the products or services you provide. Sustainability challenges us to ask the bigger question:

How can we meet today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs?

The answer lies in sustainable development, which has evolved into a core philosophy for businesses aiming for long-term success. At its heart, sustainability is about finding the right **balance between three key areas**: environmental protection, economic growth, and social well-being – often called the “triple bottom line” or, more simply, “**planet, profit, and people**.” This philosophy drives us to make choices today that won't harm the world tomorrow.

Think of it this way: **instead of taking from the Earth, a sustainable business “borrows” resources with the promise to replenish them.** This idea of responsible consumption is something consumers are increasingly demanding. Together, we (individuals and businesses) can promote this shift towards a healthier relationship with the planet. How, you may ask? Well, in a world where responsibility and success go hand in hand, the businesses that truly stand out aren't just the ones that grow; they're the ones that help the world grow, too! Sustainable business practices include steps like reducing waste, conserving energy, sourcing materials responsibly, and cutting down on carbon footprints. But it doesn't stop there! Modern consumers and employees alike are drawn to socially responsible organisations. Customers want to support brands that align with their values, and employees take pride in working for companies that make a difference.

Here's the bottom line: You should know the role you want your business to play in shaping the future. By making sustainability a core part of your strategy, you're also building trust, loyalty, and a team proud to stand behind your mission. After all, real, lasting profits come from creating genuine value for your customers and earning their trust. **When you focus on long-term impact rather than short-term gains, profitability often follows naturally.**



Measuring Success Beyond Profits

Second Chapter – Subchapter 3/3

2.2.3

When we think about business success, the first thought that often comes to mind is profits. Revenue, margins, and market share have long been the traditional markers of achievement. But with all the changes happening around us, entrepreneurship has become about so much more than just creating products, offering services, or making a profit. Every business (regardless of type) demands innovation, resilience, and a keen sense of opportunity. **The real difference lies in the goals we set and how we measure success.**

Success is no longer just about numbers on a balance sheet and profit isn't just a financial metric, but is the actual outcome of creating value, fostering innovation, and earning trust. Everything now revolves around impact, purpose, and the legacy you leave behind.



Today, a company's value isn't just in what it earns but also in what it gives back.

Customers, employees, and investors are increasingly drawn to businesses that stand for something more, prioritising sustainability, community engagement, and ethical practices alongside profitability. In this context, circular economies and collaborative ecosystems have become essential frameworks for growing responsibly while sharing value and driving innovation.

Redefining success starts with rethinking what "winning" means for your business. But before creating that definition, you should recognise that successful organisations are not always efficient, and efficient organisations are not always successful. It's about doing the right things and doing them in the right way. Ask yourself: What kind of impact are we making on the world around us? Are we contributing to social progress, environmental responsibility, employee well-being, customer satisfaction, innovation, adaptability, and beyond?

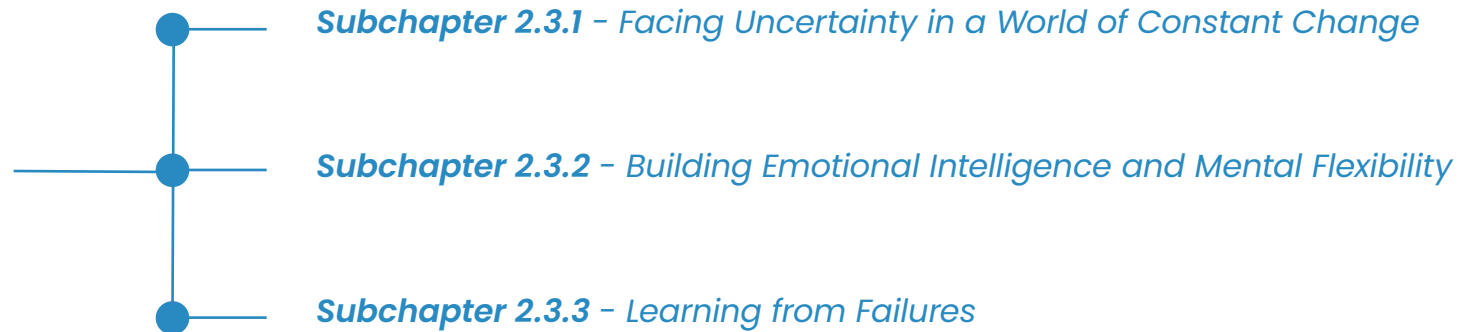
It's tempting to focus on revenue as the ultimate measure of success. However, true success isn't about how much you sell but whether you help your customers achieve their goals. Do that well, and the money will come. **Metrics are powerful, but only if they're meaningful.** Focusing on shallow, surface-level metrics can lead to misguided decisions, while thoughtful analysis can reveal deeper opportunities for growth and profit. Don't drown yourself in KPIs! Focus on the ones that truly reflect your purpose and impact. Be intentional about what you track. This isn't always easy, especially in the fast-moving, unpredictable modern business world, but it's worth the effort.

That doesn't mean profits don't matter. Of course, they do. But, focusing solely on the bottom line can sacrifice long-term value. **When you prioritise purpose, people, and the planet, profits often follow naturally as a byproduct of doing the right thing.**

Resilience & Adaptability

Third Chapter

2.3



Uncertainty is something every entrepreneur has to face at some point. There is often far more uncertainty at the beginning of the entrepreneurial journey, but that doesn't mean it disappears as you move forward. The world moves fast, sometimes too fast, and change can feel relentless. It has been said many times that successful entrepreneurs are not the ones who thrive on predictability but on chaos. To achieve this, resilience and adaptability are both helpful and essential, acting as lifelines for survival and growth in a constantly changing world.

This chapter explores how important it is to embrace adaptability as a strength and how to navigate through chaos, stay grounded when the pressure builds, and turn every twist and turn into an opportunity to grow. We begin by examining how to face uncertainty directly and shift from feeling overwhelmed to feeling empowered. Next, we explore how emotional intelligence and mental flexibility can help you stay calm and make clear, confident decisions no matter what challenges come your way. And, of course, we can't talk about resilience without addressing failure, as through failure, we often discover strengths we didn't know we had.

Facing Uncertainty in a World of Constant Change

2.3.1

Third Chapter – Subchapter 1/3

Change can often feel overwhelming. Just when you think you've found your rhythm, **the world throws something unexpected your way**. But that's the reality of life and business. The world is full of constant change, and facing uncertainty is inevitable. And while it can feel challenging, it's also a powerful opportunity to evolve and discover new possibilities.

But that's really, really hard! Humans generally don't like change, and our automatic response is to try and make the anxiety connected to it go away instead of embracing it. But that shouldn't be the case! You should recognise that facing uncertainty is the inevitable first step towards business and personal growth.

Adaptability and resilience are two of the most important factors in the entrepreneurial journey. These traits form the foundation for navigating a world that never stands still. **Adaptability** allows us to stay flexible, open to new ideas, and willing to pivot when circumstances demand it. It's the mindset that allows you to view the unexpected as an opportunity rather than a setback. **Resilience**, on the other hand, is about digging deep, staying grounded, and finding the strength to move forward, no matter how difficult the path becomes.

When the world around you feels chaotic, focus on what you can control.

You can control your reactions, decisions, and attitude, which are constants that help you stay true to your core values as you create anchors to keep you steady when everything else feels uncertain. There's a lot of pressure and expectations for entrepreneurs always to know what to do and what should happen at all times, which only compounds that anxiety and increases the chances that you'll find yourself with slow growth and an underperforming product or service.

At those times, remember that paralysis can ruin your company. The industry and the competition move too fast for you to do nothing. As they say, "any decision is better than no decision." And to some extent, that is true. But you have to strike a balance between the two extremes. The right decision a week later, after additional brainstorming, testing, and prototyping, is better than going down the wrong path for the past few months. **Uncertainty does not have to be paralysing;** it can actually be a catalyst for growth, creativity, and meaningful breakthroughs.

You will never have all the answers, but you should have the courage to keep going, even when the road ahead is uncertain. But everything starts with the mindset shift! Instead of seeing it as a threat, consider it an opportunity to adapt, innovate, and discover new possibilities. After all, some of the most groundbreaking ideas and successful businesses were born in times of unpredictability.

Of course, uncertainty isn't always easy to embrace. It brings doubt, fear, and sometimes failure. But within those moments lies the power to reflect, regroup, and find a better way forward. Every time you face the unknown and come out the other side, you grow stronger, more resilient, and better equipped to tackle whatever comes next. **The truth is, uncertainty isn't your enemy but rather a simple reality of life and business.** What matters most is how you respond to it. And by building adaptability and resilience into your mindset and strategy, you're on the right path to surviving the chaos and thriving within it.

Building Emotional Intelligence and Mental Flexibility

2.3.2

Third Chapter – Subchapter 2/3

Entrepreneurship is a journey full of strong feelings, risks, and sometimes unexpected setbacks. As entrepreneurs, we're often put in situations requiring more than hard skills. We need to handle stress and stay emotionally flexible. This means reprogramming how you approach obstacles, opportunities and even failures. **It's choosing to see change not as something to fear but as a chance to grow.**

But here's the tricky part: mindset shifts don't happen overnight. They require intention, attention, practice, and, most importantly, emotional intelligence and mental flexibility. Your greatest asset isn't just a sharp mind or a bold idea but also the ability to stay composed, empathetic, and open to change.

Entrepreneurship is an emotional rollercoaster full of ups and downs, with unexpected twists and turns.

Emotional intelligence begins with self-awareness, understanding your emotions, managing them in challenging situations, and recognising their impact on your decisions. It also involves empathy and building strong relationships. Think of it as a compass that helps you stay calm, process setbacks, and respond thoughtfully. Emotional intelligence isn't a fixed trait but develops over time. Most importantly, recognising a lack of emotional intelligence is the first step towards personal growth and development in this crucial area.

Mental flexibility, on the other hand, is the ability to pivot your mindset. It's about letting go of rigid thinking and embracing new perspectives, even when they challenge your assumptions. This involves staying curious, asking questions, and being willing to unlearn old habits to make space for better ones. It's what helps you adapt to change without losing your footing.

So, how do you cultivate this combination of emotional intelligence and mental flexibility to spark a mindset shift? Start small. Building these traits takes practice. It starts with small steps: pausing to reflect before reacting, actively listening to understand rather than respond, and challenging yourself to view obstacles as opportunities. The beauty of a mindset shift is that it changes how you think and how you approach the world.

Together, emotional intelligence and mental flexibility create a powerful combination. They allow you to approach problems with clarity and empathy, find creative solutions, and bounce back from setbacks gracefully. **Developing emotional intelligence is something that most aspiring entrepreneurs don't do as much as they should.** Even the strongest businesses can fail without it. Remember, being tough, having empathy, and truly knowing yourself are just as essential to success as having a plan and working hard.



Learning from Failures

2.3.3

Third Chapter – Subchapter 3/3

Failure. It's a word that carries a lot of weight, often wrapped in fear, disappointment, or even embarrassment. But in entrepreneurship, failure isn't the opposite of success, as it's a necessary part of the journey towards it. In fact, some of the most impactful businesses and innovations were born out of missteps and setbacks.

Failure isn't the end. It's the beginning of knowledge, resilience, and unexpected opportunity.

Not only entrepreneurs but every person faces two ways to deal with their failures. They can accept it, analyse what went wrong, identify the loopholes, and learn from it. Or they refuse to accept that they failed. By focusing on denial, they miss the opportunity to analyse their mistakes and fail to learn, repeating the same errors.

There are no failures, just opportunities to learn.

Learning from failure is shifting how you view it. Instead of seeing failure as an endpoint, recognise it as a stepping stone. We could say that failure is where the real lessons lie, as it forces you to reflect, adapt, and try again with newfound clarity. Think of it as a teacher, not one you necessarily enjoy, but one that pushes you to grow in ways you never imagined.

But let's be honest, failure doesn't feel good in the moment. It can shake your confidence and make you question your abilities. That's where resilience comes in, allowing you to bounce back, rebuild, and keep going. It's what separates entrepreneurs who give up from those who eventually succeed. Every time you get back up after a fall, you reinforce your ability to handle whatever comes next. That's why the second piece of the puzzle is adaptability. Failure often highlights areas where change is needed, whether it's in your approach, your strategy, or even your mindset. Being open to learning and adjusting turns a mistake into a breakthrough.

Finally, remember that failure isn't just a personal experience but a shared one. Almost every successful entrepreneur has a story about when they hit rock bottom, made the wrong call, or faced obstacles. These stories aren't just cautionary tales but are reminders that failure is part of the entrepreneurial journey.

At the end of the day, failure is unavoidable, but it doesn't define you. **What defines you is how you rise from it.** So, the next time you stumble, take a deep breath, dust yourself off, and ask yourself: What can I learn from this, and how will it make me better? Because every failure brings you one step closer to the success you're working so hard to achieve.

Article Summary

Quick summary & the Author's insights

Entrepreneurship is a journey of creating, adapting, and thriving in a world that is constantly evolving. It's a path that calls for courage, vision, and an unshakable belief in your ability to make a difference. This year's focus, "Empowering the Future of Entrepreneurship," centred on three vital themes. We explored the Modern Entrepreneurial Landscape, highlighting the shift to digital-first strategies, the importance of prioritising customers, and how to navigate opportunities in an unpredictable world. We then dove into Purpose-Driven Entrepreneurship, emphasising the value of creating positive social impact, integrating sustainability, and measuring success beyond profits. Lastly, we tackled resilience and adaptability, addressing how to face uncertainty, build emotional intelligence, and grow stronger through failures.

As we conclude, take a moment to celebrate your journey so far and the steps you've taken toward your goals. Every decision, every lesson, and every connection is a building block for the legacy you're creating. The road ahead may be uncertain, but it's also filled with endless potential.

Author's insights:

As you've likely experienced, the entrepreneurial journey is anything but predictable. It's a winding path filled with triumphs, setbacks, and everything in between. Over the past three years of the Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative, I've had the privilege of walking alongside inspiring entrepreneurs, witnessing the resilience, creativity, and determination that define their journeys. In a world that refuses to stand still, we must empower the future of entrepreneurship by embracing change, finding opportunities in uncertainty, and building legacies that resonate far beyond today.

The challenges are real, but so is your capacity to overcome them. Trust your vision, honour your values, and let your passion light the way. Each step you take moves you closer to your goals and the impact you're destined to create. Your journey matters and the world is better because of it. Keep going with heart and purpose because what you're building is truly worth it.

Advice from Global Experts

Over 100 participant sections, each filled with advice and insights

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In the following pages, you'll find valuable advice and insights from over 100 global experts. This year, we had the privilege of welcoming **149 exceptional individuals** to our initiative. We're amazed and deeply moved each year as more people join us, exceeding our goal of 100 yearly participants. We're sincerely grateful for the continued interest and support our initiative receives, enabling us to carry on this tradition and bring together diverse experiences and perspectives.

Each participant was asked a simple yet powerful question:

"What advice would you give yourself if you were starting your entrepreneurial journey all over again, armed with the knowledge and experiences you have today?"



Notes & Disclaimers:

* Images (profile pictures and company logos) are clickable and link to personal and/or company profiles or websites.

** The participants listed are presented in no specific order. The arrangement does not indicate any ranking, preference, or hierarchy among them.

*** Each participant has granted permission for the use of their personal information, including, but not limited to, their name, title, provided advice, profile picture, logo, personal LinkedIn link, company LinkedIn link, or company website link. This information is used exclusively for the Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative and related activities.

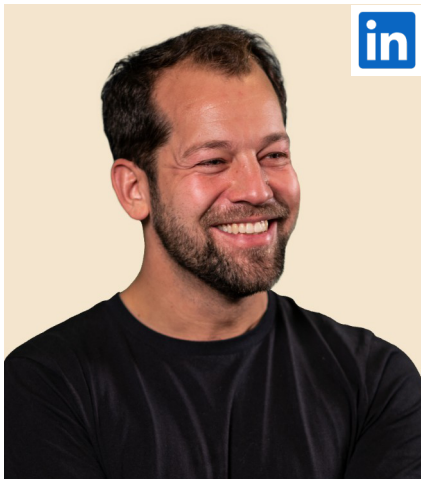


William Douglas Harward

Founder & Chairman of Training Industry – USA

In addition to the fundamentals of being properly capitalized and focused on customers and how your products and services meet their needs, you also need to ensure you **surround yourself and your business with people who you can trust and who make you better.**

Entrepreneurs often feel comfortable with people who are similar to themselves and think similarly, but it's important to bring into your business differing ideas and personalities – people who challenge you and make you and your team better. This also includes building your business with clients that are good for your business. This may sound counter-intuitive, as early-stage entrepreneurs feel they need any and all business, but some customers will demand things of your business that are not aligned with what helps your business grow and prosper.



Rune Theill

Co-Founder & CEO of Rockstart – Netherlands

If I were to restart my journey with a focus on both personal and career growth, I would approach it with a focus on developing self-awareness. True success lies not only in professional advancement but also in emotional growth – the ability to deal with challenges coming at us with a balanced mind. To build a strong foundation for both, I would offer myself the following advice:

Embrace Discomfort: Growth, whether personal or professional, happens outside your comfort zone. Take on new challenges, seek leadership roles, explore unfamiliar situations, and step into circumstances that test your resilience.

Surround Yourself with Positive Influences: Your environment plays a critical role in shaping both your personal and professional development. Surround yourself with mentors, colleagues, and friends who inspire you and challenge you to grow. A strong, supportive network helps keep you motivated and focused on achieving your goals.

Self-Compassion: In both career and personal life, things can and will go wrong. Instead of punishing yourself or being self-critical, treat yourself with kindness. Face mistakes as opportunities to learn; self-compassion builds resilience. When you go down, the bottom helps you bounce back stronger and more focused.





Pierre Boutin

Group Managing Director & CEO of Volkswagen Group – Ireland

VOLKSWAGEN GROUP
IRELAND

Set Bold, Purpose-Driven Goals: Great entrepreneurs don't just aim for profits – they dream big. A clear vision that tackles real-world problems, even the smallest ones, and improves your community's well-being is what will truly set you apart.

Embrace Growth Through Learning: Every setback is a stepping stone. Failures are your greatest teachers. Surround yourself with talented individuals who will challenge you to think bigger and push you beyond your limits. Remember that no one makes anything happen solely on their own.

Execute Relentlessly: Ideas are everywhere, but success lies in execution. Focus on tangible and timely results. Overcoming obstacles and maintaining a laser focus on quality will separate you from the crowd.

Adapt and Thrive: The ability to pivot, seize unexpected opportunities, and recover stronger from failures is key. Channel your energy into what you can control, always with an eye on positive outcomes.

Stay True to Your Values: Your values define your legacy. Never compromise on integrity. Staying authentic to who you are will be the foundation of your long-term success.

Above all, make sure you add fun and passion to your journey, as this is the best source of renewable and successful energy.



Mohamed Al Banna

Founder & CEO of LEAD Ventures – UAE



One of the biggest mistakes I made early in my entrepreneurial journey was renting an entire floor for my first business. I was eager to build an impressive company and a memorable experience, but this decision led to unnecessary expenses. My advice today? Not every business needs an office – at least not in the beginning. Assess if you do, and start small. Choose a modest space or, even better, opt for a business center that meets your needs – not a whole floor like I did. **Large, unnecessary payments can drain resources quickly.**

The same principle applies to team size. Some businesses require a team, while others don't. At the beginning of your journey, start with just one team member or as few as possible. Outsourcing is often more cost-effective and offers flexibility. In a crisis, you can pause or cancel contracts, saving money and reducing risk. **Remember, cash is king, so manage it wisely by avoiding overhead costs.**

Many people ask if I have a team managing my platforms, especially LinkedIn – but I handle it all myself. Every startup entrepreneur should understand that social media is essential for presenting who you are, what you do, and your philosophy. "Seeing is believing." People quickly form opinions based on your online persona, so **share content that truly reflects your passions and values.** Recognizing the power of social media is just the first step; knowing how to use it effectively is what truly makes an impact.

On your journey, you'll face challenges, and when they arise, it's crucial to stay positive and not let others influence you. People may try to make you doubt yourself, but keep pushing forward as long as you believe in your work. **Stay resilient and focused.** Sometimes, even friends or family might bring you down. In those moments, you have two choices: let doubts affect you, or use them as motivation. Focus on your dreams, stay quiet when necessary, and keep moving toward your goals.

Never lose hope and surround yourself with the right people. I believe deeply in the power of positive energy, so it's essential to be around energetic, motivated individuals – not those who bring unnecessary drama. **Your circle should uplift and inspire you.** I've been fortunate to have people who only want to help and guide me. As I often tell startups, if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room.

Find the right mentor. A good mentor is invaluable for keeping you on track and guiding you through the challenges you'll face on your journey. The right mentor can help you avoid common pitfalls and offer a perspective that only experience can provide.

Save your cash and don't rush to celebrate. Reward yourself, but don't splurge right away. Wait until your business is stable before spending on extras. The key is not to celebrate too early. Be patient and ensure your foundation is solid before indulging in any major rewards.

Lastly, **be willing to help others,** even without expecting anything in return. The greatest reward is watching them succeed on their journey.



Folajimi Daodu

Founder & CEO of Vault Hill – UAE



Vault Hill

Building meaningful relationships is all about giving and being less transactional. When you engage with clients, customers, or colleagues, **focus on providing genuine value** rather than seeking immediate returns. Always ask, “How can I support or help you?” even when you may not have the capacity to offer direct help. Just showing that you care can make all the difference. Remember, we’re all human, and people connect more with personalities than brands.

Mental health is often overlooked, especially when you’re building a startup. It’s essential to have mentors or peers you can lean on – those who have gone through similar challenges. If you’re a seed-stage founder, find someone at the pre-seed stage and someone at Series A to buddy with. This isn’t about financial support; it’s about sharing experiences and advice on things like hiring, team management, and building a strong company culture. **Stay connected to people, be caring, and surround yourself with those who can help you grow** – not just as an entrepreneur but as a person.



Daniel Cohen

CEO at PayU GPO – Netherlands



Never stop investing in creating the right culture for your company! Culture is critical to success. A strong, purpose-driven culture creates alignment between individual goals and organizational objectives. When team members feel connected to the company’s mission, they are not just executing tasks – they are actively contributing to a shared vision. This sense of belonging fuels engagement, drives creativity, and ignites passion.

A positive culture fosters an environment where innovation thrives because people feel empowered to take risks, share ideas, and challenge the status quo. In essence, **culture is the invisible thread that binds a company’s success together**. It is a continuous journey, evolving with time, but it remains the driving force behind innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.



Alessandro Rimassa

Founder & CEO of Radical HR – Italy



Put people at the core: I now understand that people are the most important asset in any business. It's not just about having a great product or idea – it's about building a culture where transparency, trust, and innovation are central values. I would invest in fostering talent, promoting continuous growth, and building strong, authentic relationships both inside and outside the company. Success comes from supporting and developing the people who work with us.

Embrace change and stay flexible: My experience has taught me that adaptability is essential in a constantly evolving digital world. I would remind myself to stay open and curious, ready to explore new ideas and technologies. Being able to quickly adapt, pivot, and innovate is the key to remaining competitive. Don't be afraid to change direction if something isn't working; instead, see change as an opportunity for growth.

Find happiness in the journey: I would remind myself to find fulfillment not just in achieving goals but in the process itself. An entrepreneur must learn to enjoy daily challenges, setbacks, and victories. Passion, love for innovation, and curiosity should be the driving forces. Remember that making a positive impact on people and society can coexist with creating economic value.

These pieces of advice reflect my belief that today, more than ever, **we can build businesses with a positive impact** while keeping a relentless focus on innovation and continuous growth.



Raphael Sauleau

CEO at IYC (The International Yacht Company) – Monaco



THE INTERNATIONAL YACHT COMPANY

Invest in Your Team: Recognize that a company's success is driven by its people. Investing in the training and development of your team, fostering a positive work culture, and attracting top talent are essential strategies. Training, benefits, environment, and respect equal increased retention for both your team and customers.

Stay Ahead of Market Trends: Keep a keen eye on market trends and evolving customer preferences. Being adaptable and innovative in meeting these changing demands will set your company apart in a competitive industry.

Nurture a Brand of Excellence: Strive to build and maintain a brand that is synonymous with excellence, exclusivity, and unparalleled experiences. Your brand's reputation is one of your most valuable assets.

Maintain Financial Acumen: Keep a strong focus on the financial health of the business, balancing bold investments with prudent financial planning, and knowing how and when to take a risk.

Build Strong Relationships: Understand the value of building and maintaining strong relationships with clients, suppliers, and partners. Personalized service and attention to client needs and preferences are crucial (particularly in the luxury yacht market).

Expand Your Network: Cultivate a broad network within and beyond your industry. In my case, this meant the yachting industry, including luxury brands, hospitality, and exclusive events. These relationships can lead to strategic partnerships and new opportunities.

Focus on Innovation and Sustainability: Pioneering eco-friendly practices and technologies in your industry is not only good for the environment but also appeals to the growing market of environmentally conscious clients.

Leverage Technology: Utilize advanced technology to enhance customer experience, marketing, and operational efficiency.

Effective Communication: Use all communication tools, such as social media, media outlets, press, and others, to voice your opinions, showcase your brand, and outline valuable data. This strategic approach can elevate your brand as a perceived industry "expert."



Davide De Vido

Founder & Owner of FiDeAL – Italy

FiDeAL®

If I could go back to the past and start my business journey again, I would **select my journey mates with much more accuracy**. Your mate could be a real asset personally and for the business, but if he/she is the wrong one, it can be a weight that keeps the boat under the waterline.



Sasha Kranjac

CEO at Kloudatech – Estonia | CEO at Kranjac IT Training and Consulting – Croatia


KLOUDATECH
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In short, I'd start my entrepreneurial journey sooner. **Don't be afraid of failure** as it is not the opposite of success – it is an opportunity to learn, and it should be treated as a stepping stone towards it. Learning should be your priority as knowledge is your most valuable asset.



Andreas Lindgreen Borgmann

Co-Founder & CEO of Kcal Group – UAE



In the early stages of my entrepreneurial journey, there are a few lessons I wish I had fully understood, and they revolve around two key principles: **building strong connections** and the **importance of continuous learning**.

Firstly, the value of connections cannot be overstated. As a new entrepreneur, especially in those crucial first years before your business breaks even, you have little more to offer than your word, passion, and drive. This is why it is so critical to **master the art of communication**. You need to draw people into your mission, whether they are potential partners, employees, or investors. These early connections can provide the support and opportunities that will push your business forward when resources are thin. Too often, we underestimate how important it is to network and build relationships, but the truth is, that people are more likely to back your vision if they believe in you as a communicator and a leader. Fostering these relationships is an investment in your business's future.

Secondly, the importance of continuous learning cannot be ignored. There are countless books, courses, and resources available to help entrepreneurs grow, and I've come to realize that **studying every day is vital**. Whether it's learning more about leadership, finance, marketing, or industry trends, each new piece of knowledge helps build confidence. Confidence, in turn, amplifies your ability to make sound decisions, hire the right people, and navigate the ever-changing landscape of business. Too many people dismiss the need for constant learning, thinking they've already mastered what's necessary. However, continuous learning is what sets great entrepreneurs apart from the rest. It allows you to evolve, adapt, and lead your business with a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

In the end, being an entrepreneur is not just about having a great idea. It's about **bringing people together and growing yourself as much as your business**. Those who master communication and commit to learning every day are the ones who will thrive.



Jan de Jong

Co-Founder of Webpower Adria & Daidream |
President of Digital Nomad Association – Croatia

Throughout my entrepreneurial career, I have always had business partners. Not a single time have I started a business all by myself, and I have never been the sole owner of any business. That's because I believe that good partners and **being in a partnership can benefit the business**. Owning the business all by yourself might have advantages, but there are definitely advantages to sharing a business with others.

As your entrepreneurial career progresses, your views on what you are looking for in a partner might change. When I was starting my first business, I was 22 years old. At that moment, I needed a partner who could invest money while at the same time act as a mentor to me. I needed a more experienced entrepreneur by my side. In exchange, I was working tirelessly to run the business and to make it grow, which was something my business partner was not doing. In other words, we were very complementary to each other. Together, we were a great team.

As I got older and made my first exit from M+ Group, I felt that I needed a partner who could be more involved in operations, so I could be more involved as an owner and less in the day-to-day management. Throughout my entrepreneurial career, I have had horrible partners, bad partners, good partners, and amazing partners. And with all my experience in entering partnerships – both good and bad – I still believe that **the best way to make a business succeed is to have a great business partner by your side** with whom you can build businesses together – as a team.

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digital
nomad
association
croatia



Angelo Coletta

Co-Founder & CEO of Zakeke – Italy



If I could give myself advice at the start of my journey, I'd say: **take your time**. Don't rush the process, and surround yourself with people who challenge your ideas and aren't afraid to speak up. Having a skilled operations team on the ground is invaluable, but **equally important are patience and determination**. These two qualities will help you overcome obstacles and stay focused on the bigger picture. Every challenge is a learning opportunity, and success comes from persistence.

If you think you need \$1 million, raise \$2 million. It's essential to **plan for unforeseen challenges and opportunities**. Having extra capital ensures you can adapt to unexpected changes without compromising growth or stability.

When someone isn't the right fit, address it promptly and thoughtfully. **Building the right team is critical for success**. Especially in the early stages of a startup, mistakes can be costly, and you can't afford delays in getting the right people on board to drive your vision forward. It's important to recognize when someone may not align with the company's needs and make decisions that benefit both the individual and the organization's long-term goals.



Jan Bruckner

Founder of 10Xpansion | Director Germany at Austrian Business Agency – Austria



My first piece of advice would be not to be replaced by AI but instead to leverage it as a powerful tool to automate repetitive tasks and gain insights from data. **Encourage yourself to use the most cost-efficient data tools available** to target specific audiences, understanding their motivations, pain points, and aspirations. This will help you tailor your offerings precisely to their needs, ultimately driving growth and success.

My second piece of advice would be to **make use of the often-underutilized resources** provided by government trade and investment agencies that support international growth. These resources are, in most cases, free and can be a game-changer for entrepreneurs going international. They allow you to access market reports, industry analyses, and competitor insights to better understand the cultural nuances, legal frameworks, and economic conditions of the target markets.

Additionally, take advantage of export assistance, foreign direct investment programs, and networking opportunities offered by these agencies so that you can **expand your reach and forge strong partnerships**.



Christi Maherry

Co-CEO at Snode Technologies | Co-Founder of LAWtrust – South Africa



You can't rely on anyone else to save you. You have to save yourself. Remember that **today's struggles are tomorrow's strengths**. Be true to yourself and know who you are, and everything else will fall into place naturally.

This advice is also relevant to your entrepreneurial journey. **Stay passionate about your purpose** and keep an eye out for any changes that could impact your goals. You'll need to navigate through turbulence, uncertainty, and ambiguity, so it's important to develop multiple scenarios to ensure that you stay on track. Above all, remember that **courage is a habit that you need to practice every day**. Be brave, face your fears, and live your life with purpose.



Gregor Rosulnik

Founder of GORR – Slovenia



Since 2013, I have been running my own business, and I've learned that **it's important to join various business clubs and associations from the very beginning**. These networks provide opportunities to regularly socialize with successful entrepreneurs and managers, allowing for the exchange of knowledge, experience, and contacts. They also offer potential opportunities for selling and buying, as well as for building long-term partnerships and collaborations. In B2B sales, this kind of networking is crucial.



Jo Wright

Co-Founder of Coaching Culture | Founder of Jo Wright Speaker & Coach – UK



I often liken building a business to being on a rollercoaster ride: you're laughing and smiling one minute, and then suddenly, you realize you're not wearing a seatbelt! It's both exhilarating and scary all at the same time. **Success is down to many factors, so I'll summarise them into three Ms: Mindset, Marketing, and Mentor.**

Mindset: Recognizing our fears and limiting beliefs and learning how to overcome them, helps us develop a fearless attitude and a growth mindset to be able to give things a go, no matter what the outcome. Not being afraid to make mistakes and viewing them as a valuable learning opportunity is so important. There are many people who will want to challenge and put your ideas down, but when we realise that they are seeing the world from their own perspective and reality, it's an empowering position to be in. Having the right mindset isn't just about staying optimistic, but about being adaptable, constantly learning, and having the confidence to take calculated risks. Maintaining a "can-do" attitude and believing that everything can be worked out is liberating. We simply need to be able to ask the right questions. Finally, I'd focus on personal well-being by incorporating meditation and exercise, as well as eating well and getting plenty of sleep to stay focused, balanced, and calm.

Marketing: You can have the world's best idea, product, or service, but if nobody knows about it, then it won't go anywhere. I've learned that it's important to have a compelling message and story that builds relationships for the long term. Building a personal brand has allowed me to connect with people on a deeper level and create authentic connections with customers, rather than relying on short-term tactics to drive sales. It's also important to remain open to creative and innovative ways to communicate your message. Creating fans through long-lasting relationships and building trust through consistent, value-driven marketing is the cornerstone of sustained growth.

Mentor: Furthermore, surround yourself with great people who lift you up, challenge you to grow, and offer diverse perspectives. I'd recommend finding a mentor early on – someone who has been there and "bought the t-shirt" already. Someone who you consider a role model and from whom you can learn. Someone who is already further up the entrepreneurial ladder than you are. Their learnings and insights will save you a lot of time and money in the long term. I'd also recommend a coach to help you with your mindset and to hold you accountable for achieving your goals.



Damarys Zampini

Founder & CEO of SUSTRATEGY – Canada



- 1) Be Confident! Stick to your plan, and **follow through with your idea** from creation, growth, expansion, to exit.
- 2) Listen to the advice of others, be respectful of their input and the time people take to give their ideas and opinions. Often, it isn't about how they "did it" that is valuable, but about **learning from the mistakes they made and avoiding those!** That is a key takeaway.
- 3) When listening to advice or opinions, remember that some folks want your success, but maybe not that much. Ultimately: They are not in your shoes! So, **choose the applicable and useful parts and pieces of input, that are going to augment your goals and apply them to your case**, your timing, your scenario, and your long-term plan.
- 4) Know that you don't know it all and that you need to be flexible and have the humility to let others bring value to your idea. Yes, it is your "baby," but it takes a village to raise one! **Don't be afraid to ask for help.**
- 5) Entrepreneurship is not easy, it's hard, and **it takes courage and determination.** It takes standing up when you want to lay on the couch and watch movies... It takes guts to say no to nay-sayers and stick to your course. It takes the humility of not getting paid for weeks because you are pursuing something bigger.
- 6) **You are the only one who will determine your outcome.** Know your worth, have patience, and seek a good, small network, really, one or two "confidants" whom you can truly celebrate with (even the small wins) but also those who will be there to listen when you need a shoulder to cry on.
- 7) Be careful whom you share your energy with, your energy is so valuable! But not everyone will value it, so **be vigilant and stick to your plan.**
- 8) Stay Fit! Fit body, fit mind, you need your tools, sharp.
- 9) Finally, celebrate! Because without entrepreneurs, the world would be a boring place! **All ideas are necessary, they all have merit, and each serves a purpose, and that purpose is you!** #innovateordie



Primož Zelenšek

Co-Founder & CEO of Chipolo – Slovenia



If you have the **right idea** that solves real problems, possess enough **persistence** and **adaptability**, and have the **right team**, then you are ready for a seat on the entrepreneurship roller coaster. You will think you are at the top, only to be quickly taken to the bottom and then back up again, with something new around every corner. **Good luck on your journey!**



Peter Sorgenfrei

Founder, CEO & Founder Coach at Sorgenfrei – Denmark



Breathe. You do not need to run faster, jump higher, or be more intelligent than everyone else. **Focus on what brings you joy** in your work, and it will be all right.

Here's what matters, in order of priority:

- 1) **Your mental and physical health.**
- 2) **Your personal relationships.**

That's it. Everything else is optional, the good stuff and the bad; you always have a choice. Oh, and **sell every day!**



J. Allen Brack

Co-Founder of Magic Soup Games – USA



Making great games requires a special kind of magic because, ultimately, what's good or fun is not formulaic and can't be purely quantified. **Data** is important, but there is also **instinct, experience, learning from the community,** and **gut feeling** when it comes to true 'fun'. Making games is incredibly hard – Working with teams of creative and technical people all trying to move in the same direction and end up with something to launch is a miracle every time it happens. If a game is lucky enough to be both good and successful, it's a double miracle.

A few entrepreneurial and creative leadership lessons:

1) The culture you create for your teams is your most valuable creation:

- The amount of creative energy you need to make a great video game is infinite, and nothing great ever gets created with pessimism and fear.
- People support what they help create, so make a structure that gives people a seat in decision-making.
- When faced with challenges, it's never too late to make the right decision for the team, for the players, or for the company.

2) Address problems as early as possible: The human tendency is to defer pain or discomfort, but this does not serve you, your team, or the project. Things do not magically get better by not working on them. Even small, unaddressed issues magnify over time; the same is true for solutions that can pay dividends.

3) Prepare for the Valley of Despair: What you are making/building/creating – it's incredibly difficult. There will be significant moments of despair along your journey. This leads to two lessons, because it's so hard, because it's so challenging, you better love what you are building. The second lesson is to over invest in building a trusting space for people to share from their hearts not just their heads, so you buoy each other through difficult times.

4) Actively invite opinions. It's easy for a leader's voice to drown others out, and avoid being challenged. Consciously push against that instinct and "yes people". Move towards individuals telling you things you don't like or agree with. It will make you better and you'll make better decisions.

Lastly, a quote from a brilliant film, "The world is often unkind to new talent, new creations. The new needs friends." You better believe it.



Usama Naeem Nini

Co-Founder of Qureos – UAE

qureos™

If I were to start my journey again, two pieces of advice would stand out as pivotal: **go all in when you have conviction and embrace an unconventional path, even when it's daunting.**

One of my earliest lessons came from my time in a highly competitive undergraduate program. It was the kind of environment where persistence was key, and it would have been easy to give up. At one point, I was tempted to do just that. But my elder brother gave me a piece of advice that stayed with me: "If you have conviction, go all in, even if you fail." He was right. The downside – losing a year – was minimal in the grand scheme of things. What truly mattered was the chance to **push myself beyond my perceived limits.** Succeeding meant more than just graduating; it was about learning to persevere, adapt, and thrive when the stakes felt high.

The second piece of advice I've learned over time is that the path to success doesn't have to be conventional. In fact, the uniqueness of how you get there matters more than what you studied in school. **What sets you apart is your passion for what you do** and your willingness to create your own route. It can be scary and lonely to step away from a traditional path, but that's also the way to discover what truly drives you. When you love what you do, you're not just trying to get by – you push beyond limits, which sets you apart from those simply following the crowd.

In the end, it's about **trusting your instincts, even when the path is uncertain.** Success isn't always about following a formula – it's about finding what works for you and going all in, no matter how unconventional that path may be.



Thomas Siersbæk Heller-Njor

Co-Founder & CEO of CostBits & CostAdvisory – Denmark

Ignore all the nay-sayers. Do your very best to stay clear of them at all times. Most people that we meet on our way as founders are non-founders, so their perspective on what we founders think it “takes to build” and what entails “sacrifice for the business” is inherently disconnected from their own reality of having stable jobs, predictable income, fixed routines, normal working hours, real sleep, no nightly panic attacks about how to pay your staff, etc. Even without asking for their opinion, they will tend to solicit it. They do not do this to be negative but to show interest in what we are building. But until our new businesses succeed, our stories are going to sound like failure to them, which makes them question why we do this and likely consider our ventures poorly concocted. This is far from the truth – we are just building on failures that we had the courage to make, and every day moves us one step forward. So when they give their opinion – **respect it, but don’t take it to heart.** I stopped doing that early on, and it removed one more bump on our road to success.



Rok Makovec

Founder & CEO of IT Melona – Slovenia

If I could start my entrepreneurial journey again with all the knowledge and experience I have today, I would give myself this advice: **Take your time and be persistent.** Every step outside your comfort zone is less scary than it seems at first. It’s important to believe in yourself and understand that persistence and patience are what lead to success. Don’t be afraid of new challenges, as they are the ones that push you to grow the most, both personally and professionally.





Andrew Wrobel

Founding Partner at Emerging Europe – UK



If there's one thing I wish someone had told me earlier, it's this: **failure does not define you**. It feels personal, like the weight of the world is pressing down, but it's just part of the process.

Now, when I look back, every failure, setback, or unexpected detour taught me something crucial that shaped who I am today. Of course, it didn't feel like that at the time because we're conditioned to think that failure is the opposite of success, that we disappoint – ourselves or others – if we don't succeed. But that's not true.

You either succeed, or you learn. And every time you stumble, you gain knowledge, resilience, and perspective. That's the real prize – what you do with that lesson, not the failure itself. In fact, I'd encourage you to **embrace failure as a key part of your entrepreneurial journey**. The road will be tough. You'll have plans fall apart, deals that don't close, and times where you feel like you've reached the end of your rope. But I promise, it's in those moments that your greatest growth happens. **Failure doesn't define you**. It refines you in ways success never will.

So, take the risk. Try, fall, get back up, and try again. Don't be afraid to ask for help or shift direction when needed. Those **experiences are your stepping stones, not your chains**. The only real failure is giving up. As long as you're learning and moving forward, you're already winning. Believe in yourself, trust the process, and know that every setback brings you closer to your version of success.



Morenike Fajemisin

Co-Founder & CEO of Whispa Health – Nigeria



- 1) **Don't be afraid to start:** Oftentimes we are waiting for everything to be perfect. To have enough money, to have enough people, to find the right co-founder etc. It's okay to plan to start on the best foot possible, but it's even more okay to not have everything perfect at the start. How else are you going to tell your "started from the bottom and now we're here" story?
- 2) **Do not despise your humble beginnings:** After you've started, it's important to value and not look down on your humble beginnings. Understand that you will likely be at your most creative and resilient when you have fewer resources. As things improve, the work will become more challenging or complex, but the strength you gained from those early times will carry you through. In the words of William Samuel Johnson: "He knows not his own strength who hath not met adversity".
- 3) **Be enthusiastic about finding new connections:** It's important to manage your expectations when relying on old contacts and past colleagues for support. While some may indeed offer their support, it's likely to be less than you anticipated. Therefore, it's best to adjust your expectations early on. This doesn't mean you should disregard your old connections in favour of new ones; rather, it's about not relying solely on your existing network and being active about forming new connections because they will be needed.
- 4) **Engage in self-improvement through education:** There are numerous accelerators and incubators waiting to adopt you into their next cohort. However, if you do not want to simply be part of their training metrics and want to truly gain value from these incubators, then you need to realize that they can only build on whatever foundations you have set for yourself or in simple terms, how much value you gain from these incubators, depends on you.



Siddhi Mittal

Co-Founder of yhangry – UK

yhangry

Focus less on building with the sole intention of selling or scaling quickly. Instead, immerse yourself in understanding real customer problems. This means spending a significant portion of your time talking to potential customers, listening to their challenges, and truly empathizing with their needs. It was through conversations like these that we realized gaps in the market for private chefs. Whether it's squeezing a big group into a restaurant with limited menus or stressing over food for hen dos and dinner parties, the stress is real!

Next, **be prepared to iterate constantly.** Building a product or a solution is rarely a straight path. What you think might work initially could miss the mark, and that's okay. What's important is staying flexible, testing out ideas, gathering feedback, and making the necessary adjustments as you go. Keep refining your approach until it aligns with what truly addresses those problems you've identified.



Marin Mrša

Founder & CEO of Peekator – UK

peekator

Great things take time to build. When you start, promise yourself that you'll commit to giving it a go for ten years. A decade is long enough to create amazing things and removes the pressure of expecting immediate results, which rarely come in the first months or even years.

This mindset sets you up for success. Allow yourself patience. You can control the input, but the output is often beyond your control, especially in the short term. However, if you consistently put in quality work, the results will come; there's no doubt about that. The only uncertainty is when.

I'd argue that with ten years, patience, and quality work, you will achieve your goals, no matter the scale.



Aaron Marko

Co-Founder & Master Ice Pilot at Hansen Beck – Germany

HansenBeck™

No matter what business you are in, you will find yourself in a situation where **compromises are necessary**. There is one exception to this – the people you choose to work with. When expanding your team, hiring new staff, or selecting external business partners, this is the area where you do not compromise. It is much **better not to hire someone and wait for the right person** than to onboard someone just to fill an empty slot. Always hire people who are better than you in at least one important aspect.

Furthermore, **trusting your people as their leader is the key to their motivation**, their optimal output, and long-term satisfaction. How can you build trust? Simply show genuine interest in them. Care about them. Talk about their aspirations, goals, fears, private life... Show them that you are vulnerable as well. **Express your emotions in a civilized way**. It is perfectly okay for a boss to be sentimental.

For long-term success, challenge yourself. **Demand more of yourself than others would**. If a project requires the team to work all weekend long, be the first one in the office on Saturday morning and bring fresh pastries. Be the last one to leave on Sunday evening and thank them for their hard work. Give them feedback all the time, even if it stings a bit. Demonstrate that they are safe – that no matter what happens, you will protect them.

Move on when it is time for you to move on, rather than clinging to your position and title forever. Thus, you will create space for them to grow.

Be honest with yourself – do what you love and learn to love what you do.



Gali Bloch Liran

Founder & CEO of The Human Founder – Israel

**The
Human
Founder** BY
GALI BLOCH LIRAN

If I could go back and give advice to my younger self at the beginning of my journey, the first thing I'd say is to trust myself and trust the journey. I would remind myself that I have the strength, capability, and determination to achieve any goal I set. **Trusting the process is essential**, especially during moments of uncertainty. There will be times when the path ahead seems unclear, but what's important is to check in with yourself continuously – does this path feel right? If it does, keep going. If not, **don't be afraid to pivot**, knowing that eventually, all the dots will connect. Remember: Always forward, never backwards.

Another key lesson I'd share is the importance of aiming high and staying in motion. **Life is about growth and progress**, and it's crucial to surround yourself with people who genuinely support and challenge you. Embrace every experience, as these moments shape who you are. While it's important to use your rational mind, trusting your instincts is just as vital. I learned over time that the knowledge I needed was already within me. Alongside ambition, it's crucial to **nurture your consciousness and spirit**. There are tangible goals in life, but the most significant ones are the internal ones that define who we are.

Lastly, I'd emphasize the importance of finding the right **balance between personal and professional life**. These aren't two separate worlds – they're intertwined, and achieving harmony between them is key. It's about understanding your trade-offs and knowing where to focus your energy. There's no single right balance; there's the balance that's right for you. Achievements will come in their own time, so **don't rush what isn't ready yet**. Some things in life need time to mature, and one of the greatest lessons is learning to let things unfold naturally, finding joy in each day, and allowing life to breathe.



Sukesh Tedla

Founder & CEO of Kryptos – Sweden



1) **Embrace Resilience:** Understand that setbacks are part of the process. Use them as learning opportunities rather than failures. Each challenge can refine your approach and strategies.

2) **Be Adaptable:** The world changes quickly, so stay flexible and open to new skills and opportunities. This adaptability will help you navigate uncertainties and make the most of emerging possibilities.

3) **Build Meaningful Relationships:** Surround yourself with supportive mentors and peers. Strong relationships can offer guidance, open doors, and provide the support you need to succeed.

Lastly, don't forget to **balance your professional ambitions with your personal life**. Maintaining this balance is crucial for long-term success and fulfillment.



Dagmar Turkova

Co-Founder of INova Global Solutions – UAE



If I could start my journey again, I would tell myself to **be patient and trust the process**. Life's path isn't always clear, but every twist and turn has its purpose. I'd remind myself that **it's okay to make mistakes** – they're opportunities to learn and grow. I'd also encourage myself to stay true to my passions, pursue a healthy work-life balance, and not be afraid to take risks, even when things seem uncertain.

Most importantly, I would remind myself to **seek support from others** and remember that I don't have to do everything alone. I'd emphasize the importance of surrounding myself with people who challenge me to be better, faster, and stronger. My advice is to **embrace the journey**, learn from every step, and be kind to yourself along the way.



Rok Kokalj

Co-Founder & CEO of Nevron – Slovenia



I began my entrepreneurial career about 25 years ago, and it's challenging to compare today's business landscape with that of the past. Even though venture capital in Slovenia is still tough to secure, it was practically impossible in the early years of my career. Nevertheless, as co-founders, we tried various ways to obtain this capital, but we ended up investing far too much energy and time instead of immediately directing most of our resources toward generating revenue.

Cash flow is essential for survival, from the very first breath of a company. At the start, entrepreneurs must do everything in their power to generate income as soon as possible. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking we have unlimited time, but cash flow quickly sobers us. It's crucial to develop a product or service that addresses a market need and to start selling actively. Afterwards, continuous improvement of the product or service should begin.

The second point I would highlight is personal growth. **A company can only grow with the personal growth of its entrepreneur.** This development should start as early as possible because knowledge, skills, perspectives, and awareness accumulate like compound interest. Without this, success is practically impossible, unless it's achieved through dishonest or manipulative means.

Personal development and growth are the foundation of entrepreneurial success. This component is often overlooked in entrepreneurship, especially by young entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is a thorny yet fulfilling path. To overcome exceptionally stressful and difficult moments, one needs to develop inner tools that can guide them through the toughest parts of the journey. The path to success lies only through inner transformation, not by changing external factors over which we have little to no control.



Farha Fiona Kirubi

Co-Founder & CFO of Your Social Smile – UAE



Don't be afraid to pursue all your passions at once. Too often, we feel the need to choose between what we love and what we believe will make us successful. But the real power comes from merging those worlds. If you are passionate about something – whether it's finance, technology, or social impact – find a way to integrate it into your business journey from the start.

Don't compartmentalize; let your unique combination of skills define the path you take. The most innovative ventures are born from those who **trust their instinct to blend diverse interests.**

Seek mentors who can guide you along the way – they will provide insights that can save you years of trial and error. Learn from their experiences, **but always carve your own path.**

And here's a lesson that will save you a lot of time: success is not just about how fast you can achieve independence or wealth. True success comes from how well you balance ambition with service. Yes, build your empire, but also understand that **your greatest achievement will be in how many others you lift along the way.**

Get out of your own way and try as many things as possible while you have the time and energy. **Go through life with curiosity,** but fiercely protect your time and space. Stay humble, stay connected to the communities you serve, and remember that your power lies not just in your individual success, but in how you empower others to grow alongside you.



Paul Dennis

Co-Founder of Bourne Associates | Managing Partner at RGH-Global | Business Advisor at ERP Works and Nectra Consulting – Spain

It's important to **recognize that your ideas are unique**. Even if others have similar ideas, you should focus on doing it better or differently to add your own value. Start by setting realistic and clear goals. It's easy to get overwhelmed, so make sure you know exactly what you want to achieve and when. A good tip is to **think about your end goal** and then work backwards to figure out the steps you need to take. Remember, your goals might change as your idea develops, so stay flexible and be ready to adapt. Always **keep an eye on your market** and stay up-to-date with what's happening.

I learned this from experience. Back in 2009, during the financial crisis, I created a website to help people cook better meals with what they had on hand, since many were relying on pre-packaged foods. We put a lot of work and money into it and even got patents, only to find out another company was doing something similar. This taught me the importance of **understanding your market and knowing who your competitors are**. Things change fast, especially in technology, which seems to evolve every six months (just look at how quickly AI is advancing).

Finally, **having the right mindset is crucial**. You need to be able to pick yourself up when things go wrong. Focus on being a solution provider, not just someone who solves problems. Learn from your mistakes and use those lessons to grow and improve.



Alenka Bezjak Mlakar

Co-Founder & CEO of MeetPoint – Slovenia



- 1) **Trust your instincts:** In business, your gut feeling is often one of your most valuable assets. Always rely on data to guide your decisions, but never ignore your own intuition. Both are essential for making sound business choices.
- 2) **Leverage setbacks as opportunities:** Challenges and unexpected shifts are inevitable – they're not failures – they're part of the process. Success also comes from your ability to learn from past experiences, using those insights to inform future decisions.
- 3) **Stay focused:** Sometimes, you have to say "no" and walk away from short-term wins to position yourself for greater, long-term success. The best opportunities often arise when you're prepared to forgo a small battle to secure victory in the bigger picture.



Nick Fawbert

Founder & CEO of Mutiny Consulting – Singapore



Entrepreneurship is an exercise in what makes humanity so successful. Too often we assume it's about 'great men.' We have been conditioned to believe that physical dominance and stubborn self-righteousness are passports to power, but to paraphrase John Maxwell, **if you lead without followers, you're just taking a walk.** 'Great men' is a philosophy fueled by the power and gender politics of a European industrial age almost 200 years in our past.

It took me decades to understand that the **path to the top is based on compassion**, collaboration, cohesion, a common purpose, a great culture, and a shared set of goals. You don't reach your potential by dragging other people down; you reach the top because other people put you there. Real leadership is not based on instruction but on inspiration.

Put it this way, the **first steps to a great business are not based on genius, but on the recognition of common failure.** There is a shortcoming, a gap, a problem that needs to be resolved. Your skills as an entrepreneur will not be based on the unique solution you have contrived, but by the team of like-minded individuals you build around you that fuels a process of innovation that delivers real and lasting results. That means a great team is not people that look like you, but people who contrast and conflict, and whose different life experiences mean that they will contribute ideas that are outside your imagination.

Entrepreneurship is not about leading wolves but about herding cats. You will probably mess up. You'll probably mess up frequently. But if you don't have that team around you, you'll never get past it. That's how we crossed the savannahs, that's how we scaled mountains, and that is the essence of humanity that you need to embrace.



Liesbeth Ceelen

CEO at BioLizard – Belgium



I've always believed that if you're going to do something, **you should do what you love**. Listening to my heart and following my passions has been my mantra. Daring to do something and stepping out of your comfort zone isn't always easy, but I've learned that taking that leap, even when it's scary, is so worth it. I mean, why stick to what's comfortable when you can explore what's out there, right?

Whenever I'm unsure, I remind myself that there's so much knowledge around me. I've always been open to reaching out to my friends and family for advice or getting insights from those who have the experience to help me navigate the rough patches, like a coach or a role model. And of course, I have also had my failures. But who hasn't? Failing is just part of the game. **It's not all smooth sailing, and that's actually totally okay.**

I also remind myself to **never stop learning**. Picking up new skills, reading up on the latest developments in my field, or just satisfying my curiosity keeps me on my toes. Alongside that, I focus on getting even better at the things I'm already good at. There's no point in wasting time on things that you really don't - and don't need to - master, especially if you can work with other people who are much better at it.

In the end, it's about using my strengths to push through and open doors that I never thought I could. I've come to see that **every challenge is just another chance** for me to show what I'm made of. Keeping this in my back pocket is how I turn every 'Oops' into a 'Yes I can!' and keep moving forward, turning my dreams into my reality.



Tine Lugarič

Co-Founder & Creative Director at Trampolin – Slovenia

 TRAMPOLIN

The best piece of advice I have ever received that has really stuck with me is from a global design legend, Mirko Ilić. At the Magdalena Festival, he asked me to see how the party was going inside. When I came back and told him it was 'not bad,' he replied: 'And you want to convince me with two negative words that the party is good?' I have never received better advice on how to create and present compelling content and, ultimately, how to communicate in business.



Erik van Doorne

Founder & Owner of Masters of Media – Netherlands

 MASTERS OF MEDIA

I would advise myself to **invest in myself**. I entered the world of online software development in the '90s when there were almost no proper educational institutes in this field. When there were, I should have taken the opportunity to educate myself better. I could say more or less the same about management and entrepreneurial skills. Today, I'm totally self-made, which comes with certain disadvantages.

I would also advise myself to invest more in my free time. Though working hard and working long hours in itself is not a bad thing, **taking time off is a necessity** for relaxation and a precondition for mental and personal growth. And taking time to spend with your family is essential. It's also something you can't reverse if you fail to do so.

Working and being successful is one thing, developing as a person in relation to your close ones is another. In the end, **you work to live, not the other way around**. It's a total cliché, but true.



Erez Bousso

Founder & CEO of Move/holidayheroes – Germany

holidayheroes

1) **Follow your intuition:** In the world of startups – data, trends, and opinions will flood your decision-making process. While it's important to stay informed, never underestimate the power of your gut feeling. Your intuition is often shaped by experiences, insights, and the deep understanding you have of your vision. Trust it. Some of the best decisions I've made came from following my instinct, even when the data wasn't entirely in my favour.

2) **Choose the right partners:** The people you surround yourself with – whether co-founders, investors, or team members – will have a profound impact on your success. Look for partners who not only complement your skill set but share your values and passion. These are the people who will stand by your side during the highs and lows. Their character, commitment, and vision must align with yours if you are to build something meaningful together.

3) **Look challenges in the eye:** Every entrepreneur will face obstacles – whether it's market volatility, financial struggles, or personal doubts. Avoiding these challenges won't make them disappear. Confront them head-on with determination and resilience. The ability to tackle problems directly will set you apart as a leader and create opportunities where others see only roadblocks.

Starting and growing a business is not easy, but by trusting your intuition, partnering wisely, and meeting challenges with courage, you'll give yourself the best chance of success.



Tatiana Dudyetz

Founder of MetaChief – UAE



After founding 4 businesses, one that became a \$50 million franchise in Temporary Luxury Hospitality in Canada, I would tell myself to **focus on getting to know me**, my genius zone, and my superpowers in a very intimate way... such that I become intimate with my X factor! I know that in our 20s, we don't know ourselves, and we are so overly focused on everything external, such as what people think, the impressions we make on our bosses/friends/family, etc. Especially as high achievers, we are trained to believe that achieving our goals is everything, that performance in school is everything, and that our grades are everything. We are conditioned, over and over again, to eventually fail and then to shame our failure because it's not »looking good« and doesn't match the success masks we are told are musts in the race to »do well«.

So, in fact, I would tell my younger self: **go out there and get to know who you are**. What are you made of? What qualities differentiate you from your neighbour, and WHY? Why are you different? How do you add value to the world with your genius zone?

Business is a service to the world, less about making money as the goal... that will always »f...« you up if you make money the goal because once you have it, it won't be enough. If you are not enough from within, money, status, titles, partners, etc., will never be enough. And for that reason:

- 1) **Become obsessed with getting to know your genius zone** – because it's your X factor to serve the world with and it's the wealth you have within that no one can ever take away! You can continue developing it with time.
- 2) **Fail and fail again** – learn to fail without the cycle of shame, blame, and guilt, because that cycle is the cycle of victimhood! No matter how much you achieve, if that cycle exists within you, you will slow yourself down or even manifest more failure by positioning yourself unconsciously as a victim.
- 3) **Learn to listen to your body** – not drive your body from what your mind thinks is best... Listen to what your body is saying to you – the best antidote to burnout and disease.
- 4) **Do not listen to people's opinions like the gospel** – Always look at an opinion with context: What's their experience? Where do they come from? What have they accomplished? Who are they in life as humans? People often project onto you what their perceptions are... Be discerning with what you receive from others.
- 5) **Surround yourself with people who match your values** – but also offer »neuro-divergence« to your opinions. Divergence is rich and allows us to grow and expand. We all unconsciously want to be next to those with whom we're comfortable... But that can mean they are too much »alike«, and we don't always grow with them. Differences are rich. I'm not saying to get close to those who make you feel uneasy, but to those who support your differences, honour your path and ambition, and match your values.



Robert Cash

Founder & CEO of Skye Capital – Canada



Find a successful mentor. **Relentlessly pursue your dreams.** There will always be a long line of people ready to tell you why you can't succeed. Don't join that line. Before you can sell a product or idea, you need to sell yourself. People won't buy what you have to sell until they buy into you. Great deals find money. Money doesn't always find great deals. Never compromise your integrity.



Peter Vidmar

CEO & Partner at Agencija 101 – Slovenia



The same two theses have always been and still are the key for me:

- 1) **Never give up**, even when everyone tells you that something is impossible to achieve. Everything is possible as long as you believe in yourself and are persistent enough.
- 2) Newton's law states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Therefore, **act and think positively, and do not harm others**, even if others try to harm you. By focusing on your business rather than the competition, you become better and maintain focus.



Paola Origel

Co-Founder & CEO of Hyla Fund Management – USA



H Y L A

If I had the chance, I would advise my younger self the following:

“Dear Paola,

As you embark on this incredible journey of life, I want to impart some wisdom that will guide you along the way. Remember, the **key to success lies in consistent, disciplined action**. Start investing early, no matter how small the amount, as it will grow into something meaningful over time. It's not just about how much you earn but how wisely you grow what you have. Make your health and your loved ones a top priority.

Throughout your life, **make it a point to connect with people from all walks of life**. Embrace individuals with different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, as these connections will broaden your understanding of the world and shape your personal growth. Don't worry too much about the future; instead, focus on living fully in the present, because things have a way of working themselves out.

Surround yourself with kind, compassionate people who lift you up and support your journey. These relationships will form the foundation of both your personal joy and professional success. Avoid the trap of comparison – your path is uniquely your own. Strive to become the best version of yourself, improving step by step, every day.

Stay curious and open to learning, especially from viewpoints that challenge your own. Growth happens outside your comfort zone, so embrace the discomfort that comes with change. Trust your instincts and intuition – they are your inner compass, guiding you toward your true purpose.

In business, seek out people who are smarter, more skilled, and who challenge you to rise to the next level. Partnerships with the right people will elevate your journey. Don't settle for comfort – reach higher and **surround yourself with those who inspire you**.

And **always support women**. Our strength is magnified when we lift one another up. By being compassionate, empowering, and collaborative, we send a message to the world: we will not be limited by anyone's expectations. Lead by example and show the world the resilience, intelligence, and capability of women.

Dear younger self, **embrace the journey ahead with an open heart and a curious mind**. Love and invest in yourself – personally and professionally. Build a diverse, supportive network and trust your instincts. Live in the moment and never compromise your integrity or authenticity. Success will come to those bold enough to embrace change, innovation, and diversity. Lead with thoughtfulness, and never lose sight of your true self.

I love you.”



Charul Chaturvedi Jaitly

Co-Founder of Mātiti Group | Creator of CCJ (personal brand) – UAE



My first piece of advice to myself would be to **embrace the idea of personal growth as a lifelong adventure**. Life will present numerous ongoing challenges. Instead of viewing them as obstacles, I would remind myself to see them as opportunities for learning and development.

Each setback has its own lessons, shaping resilience and wisdom. I would emphasize the importance of focusing on what I can control, understanding that many circumstances will be beyond my influence. This realization can be liberating. It allows for a greater emphasis on my responses and actions, rather than fixating on external factors.

Cultivating a positive mindset would also be a cornerstone of my journey. I would urge myself to **practice gratitude regularly**, as it has a profound effect on mental well-being. Recognizing the good in every situation, no matter how big or small, can shift perspectives and provide motivation during tough times.

Alongside this, I would **encourage a deeper exploration of my spiritual side**. Engaging in practices like meditation, journaling, or spending time in nature would help me connect with my inner self, fostering a sense of peace and understanding that can guide my decisions.

Giving back to the community is another crucial aspect I would highlight. Helping others not only enriches their lives but also brings a sense of purpose and fulfilment to my own. It's vital to **seek out ways to make a positive impact**, whether through volunteer work or simple acts of kindness. This creates a ripple effect, fostering connection and empathy in the world around me.

I would also stress the importance of **surrounding myself with a supportive network**. Building relationships with encouraging, positive individuals can uplift and inspire me. Mentors who challenge and guide me would be invaluable in navigating my journey.

Being kind to myself is essential; I would remind myself that setbacks are part of growth, and **self-compassion is crucial in moments of doubt**. Staying curious and committed to lifelong learning would be another key piece of advice. Open-mindedness can lead to unexpected opportunities and insights that enrich my life.

Summing it up, I would emphasize the importance of trusting the process and recognizing that **growth is often nonlinear**. Every step, even the missteps, contributes to the larger narrative of my journey, ultimately leading to a richer, more content, and more fulfilling life.



Alya Annabi

Founder of GreenPush – Singapore



Entrepreneurship is like a mirror of the self. It puts you on a growth journey that will teach you a lot about yourself. So, **trust the process, knowing that you will evolve over time**, and so will your business. It's okay to embrace different hats and feel multi-passionate. You don't need to fit in or try to copy others. **Embrace your journey, because it's unique to you**. Keep listening to the signs and your heart.

Don't try to do it all. Learn how to ask for help and seek mentors. They will guide you along the way. **Surround yourself with people who get you**, be part of communities, and find your tribe. Having a sounding board is so important for feeling heard and seen. Know that things will get tough sometimes, and doors will be closed, but getting rejected is part of the process. Build that muscle, rely on your mindset to overcome the challenges, and trust yourself – you can do it!



Daniel Puértolas Blanco

Co-Founder & CEO of Numéricco – Spain



- 1) **Surround yourself with the best team:** You can't be an expert in everything. The important thing is to know how to find a good team.
- 2) **Trust your team and delegate tasks:** You have to trust the people around you. That will make every challenge much easier.
- 3) **Business networking is essential to learn from the best professionals:** You lack knowledge in many areas. Look for people who know more than you and learn from them.
- 4) **Never give up:** There will be bad days and you will think that there is no point in trying so hard. Remember why you decided to start and trust that you will achieve it.
- 5) **Learn to disconnect:** Work-life balance is essential, remember that you need time for your personal life. Only if you take care of your mental health will you be able to endure the hectic pace of work.



Mariben Christine Tan Eustaquio

Founder & Managing Director of EZONE – UAE



Set Clear Boundaries Early On: As a leader who naturally wants to support others, it's easy to blur the lines between being generous and being overextended. I would remind myself to be clear about boundaries from the beginning. This means defining expectations for clients, partners, and even my own team. Boundaries aren't barriers – they are there to protect your energy, preserve your focus, and allow you to be at your best for everyone, including yourself.

Trust, but Verify: Building a business requires trusting people, but it also means ensuring you have mechanisms to validate that trust. Early in my journey, I would have set up stronger processes for accountability and performance tracking, even with people I believed in. This isn't about being distrustful; it's about creating a system that supports everyone in being their best. Trust your team, but have systems that ensure everyone stays aligned and motivated.

Anchor Every Decision to Your 'Why': Knowing your why isn't just a motivational slogan; it's a compass. When challenges arise – and they will – it's easy to get lost in the chaos. Having your why clearly defined and revisiting it regularly will help you make better decisions, avoid distractions, and stay resilient when you face setbacks. Document your why, revisit it weekly, and let it guide every major decision, from partnerships to how you invest your time.

Focus on the Goal and Growth: Entrepreneurship isn't easy, and there will be days when you feel like giving up. But remember: it's not about how many times you stumble – it's about how often you get back up and keep moving forward. Being laser-focused on your goals and long-term vision will give you the stamina to endure the ups and downs. When you find yourself overwhelmed or discouraged, go back to your why and visualize the outcome. Stay focused on what you want to achieve, because the challenges are just temporary stepping stones on the path to growth.

These lessons, shaped by my own journey, are what I wish I'd kept in mind from day one. By setting boundaries, building trust responsibly, staying anchored in my purpose, and focusing on the long game, I would have been better equipped to navigate the uncertainties and ultimately build something lasting and meaningful.



Nedim Mavric

Founding Partner & CEO of Living Impact | Founder of DeleieBolig – Norway



Having a vision is important, but to succeed, you should have three of the following four things in place before you take on the risk: a customer, a product, capital, and a team. Without the majority of those pieces, your vision will take longer to become a reality.

Speaking of time – **things will take far longer than you think**, often three to five times longer. You'll need to factor that into your planning, both mentally and financially. One key lesson is not to rely on investors from the start. Instead, try to sell a service early on to generate cash flow. This will give you more control over your growth and flexibility in decision-making.

The people you surround yourself with – cofounders, stakeholders, and investors – are vital to your success. Choose wisely, as they'll have a significant impact on your company's culture and trajectory.

Remember, **doing the right things is more important than doing things right**. This means focusing on the critical priorities rather than getting stuck on perfect execution. Fail fast and fail often. Each failure will teach you something valuable and bring you closer to the right solution. Don't wait until everything is perfect before you launch – just ship it and iterate along the way.

Ultimately, my best advice is: **Just do it**. Get started, take action, and trust that you'll figure things out as you go. It's the only way to truly learn and grow.



Maja Schreiner

Founder & CEO of Sharing Tribe – Switzerland



Stick with co-founders who align with your vision, even if they can't invest financially or match your workload – **value the diversity of strengths** they bring. Be relentlessly focused on nailing the product-market fit early. Don't settle for free or low-value deals – value your product from day one, and charge for it accordingly. Build lean, and iterate fast based on real customer feedback. **Avoid distractions and shiny new ideas** – keep refining your core offering until it truly resonates with the market. **Protect your energy** by prioritizing tasks that move the needle, rather than getting caught up in things that merely keep the business going.

Join various startup events and webinars only if you can be on stage and deliver a pitch. Don't go there to be just an attendee. Spend your time networking with your clients at their industry events instead. Lastly, remember that **it's a marathon, not a sprint**, so working part-time at times is completely fine. Take your time for everything, especially to **celebrate small wins and recalibrate along the way**.



Sonja Klopčič

Co-Founder & CEO of AEIOU Universe – Slovenia



As a young woman starting my business journey, I approached it very professionally, believing that only achievements, a sharp mind, and logical thinking counted, and emotions had to be set aside. Therefore, I would give myself and other enthusiastic young women the following advice:

Listen to your heart. View your business journey as a path of personal development. Do not be seduced by successes, nor crushed by failures. All these are merely feedback that guides you on your path. Do not separate the personal from the professional world – it is one world. In it, you can only be successful if you are true to yourself, your inner GPS, and your values. Therefore, enrich your business language with words such as compassion, mutual support, care, collaboration, and love.



John Castillo

Founder of Scratch Takes – Canada



Embrace the business side with the same passion as your craft. From an audio engineering background, I never anticipated becoming a business owner. I started Scratch Takes to solve a problem: maximizing musicians' studio time by capturing "scratch takes" on video for additional releases. Social media presence is crucial – it's where we find our audience and clients. A solid social media strategy can be the backbone of your marketing campaign without the need to spend additional advertisement dollars. This is as true in the music industry as in any other.

What began as a creative solution evolved into a growing business, and suddenly, I found myself managing people, balancing budgets, developing websites, and strategizing marketing campaigns. The transition from freelancer to entrepreneur was both exciting and overwhelming. **Running a business requires dedication, learning, and practice**, just like any art. If I could start over, I'd have immersed myself earlier in business books, watched educational videos, and taken courses to build my entrepreneurial skills. Understanding management, finance, and marketing sooner would have smoothed the journey.

Today, I run Scratch Takes with a talented team and have the privilege of teaching Entrepreneurship for Artists at York University. I **focus on imparting business knowledge** often missing from traditional curricula, helping emerging artists navigate their own ventures. With accessible tools and technologies, small businesses can compete with larger ones, making a solid business foundation even more crucial.

To anyone starting out, remember that a great idea is just the beginning. **Equip yourself with the business acumen** needed to turn your vision into a lasting reality. **Embrace lifelong learning**, and don't hesitate to seek out resources and education. In today's accessible entrepreneurial world, running a business isn't just about maintaining operations – it's about growing, adapting, and continuously refining your skills. With the right knowledge and dedication, you can build something enduring that makes a meaningful impact.



Melissa Saoudy

Founder & CEO of The Why Impact Consulting – UAE

THE WHY

Progress is rarely linear, and that's okay: Early in my career, I believed that success came from following a clear, predetermined path, checking off milestones one by one. But life, especially in entrepreneurship and impact-driven work, isn't that straightforward. Detours, challenges, and even failures aren't setbacks – they are essential parts of the process. They force you to adapt, learn, and grow in ways you never would have if everything went as planned.

Be wary of the cult of hypergrowth: There's this constant pressure to become a unicorn, to scale at breakneck speed, and "exit" as quickly as possible. But the trade-offs to achieve that kind of growth are often steep. You can lose sight of why you started, sacrificing quality, and values for short-term wins. For me, my business is my way to do my best work and create meaningful impact. If I focused solely on scaling and exiting, I would end up making decisions driven by external pressures – pressures that are often built on false assumptions of what success should look like. You don't have to race to be a unicorn. Sustainable, purpose-driven growth allows you to build something lasting and true to your vision.

Embrace uncertainty and be kinder to yourself: The pressures of perfection and the fear of not doing enough can be incredibly draining. It's important to recognize when to step back, take care of your mental and physical well-being, and refocus on why you started in the first place. Over time, you'll realize that it's not about having everything figured out, but about consistently showing up with purpose, resilience, and a willingness to keep evolving.



AnaMaria Onică

Co-Founder & CEO of VOXivers – Romania



- 1) **Embrace Flexibility:** The path to success is rarely linear. Be open to pivoting based on feedback, market needs, and emerging opportunities. Building VOXivers taught me that adaptability is crucial for long-term success.
- 2) **Focus on Building a Strong Team:** Success is a team effort. Surround yourself with people who not only have the skills but also share your passion and vision. A great team accelerates innovation and brings diverse solutions to challenges.
- 3) **Invest in Customer Relationships Early:** Understanding and prioritizing the needs of your users early on helps create products and services that truly resonate. For VOXivers, this has been essential in building solutions that parents, educators, and therapists can trust and rely on.



Sławomir Paśko

Founder & CEO of Neti – Poland



Before diving into the details, take a moment to step back and reflect on two fundamental questions: **Who are you helping, and what problem are you solving at the moment?**

Entrepreneurship is not just about building a product; it's about understanding the broader context and the impact you aspire to create. When you approach your work with intention and purpose, your solutions become far more meaningful and effective. Always keep in mind that the most powerful innovations are those that truly solve your customers' needs. With this mindset, you won't just create functional products; you'll create solutions that resonate and make a real difference in the world. Embrace this perspective, and your journey will be one of purpose, impact, and fulfilment.



Sanad Karkar

Founder of ZeroCodeLabs – Sweden



Prioritize the founding team above everything else. **The team is the most critical factor** in launching a successful startup. In fact, around 65% of startups fail due to issues within the founding team. While the idea, market opportunity, and funding are important, the true foundation of any great startup lies in the people who build it.

I've been fortunate to build with a founding team I deeply respect and value, but I learned this the hard way. In my first startup, we faced challenges due to unclear contracts and misaligned expectations, which caused unnecessary friction. This time around, I knew the pitfalls, and I made sure we navigated them smoothly.

Make sure you and your co-founders have complementary skills. **Diversity in expertise is crucial for growth**, but equally important is having a team that possesses integrity and the grit needed to tackle inevitable challenges. Startups are tough, and only those who persevere together will succeed.

From day one, have clear contracts in place. One of the biggest mistakes startups make is distributing shares early without any clear remedies in case a founder stops performing. **There must be an exit strategy**, allowing the business to grow even when issues arise. Addressing these from the start ensures the company doesn't stall when conflicts emerge.

Finally, remember that your startup is not your baby – it's your source of income. I love what I've built, but I've learned not to get emotionally attached. It's easy to fool yourself into thinking everything will work out. The core lesson here is to **know when to pivot and change direction** – a superpower that startups have, which big firms don't. Being objective, realistic, and adaptable will save you from costly mistakes and give your startup the best chance to thrive.



Bill Ferro

Co-Founder & CTO of Paren – USA



After a 37-year career in high-tech software leadership, I finally **embraced my entrepreneurial side** with a new venture in the EV data space. Throughout my career, I switched product domains from software development tools to shipping logistics, then contract management, and finally financial services. Experts told me not to leave each of these areas; that I should make a career out of the knowledge I gained in the domain, but I took my own path. Along the way, I learned more about growing teams and building complex real-time software architectures than I would have if I had stayed in one place. This experience has been directly applicable to my latest venture.

When I started as a solo entrepreneur, I needed all of these acquired technical skills to build a lasting, scalable product. When I grew my business, I needed every bit of my experience in integrating diverse, talented, and sometimes junior team members into the company and **building a culture that's inviting, challenging, and rewarding**.

Additionally, only in the last several years have I fully embraced and understood the need for a large, wide network of business contacts that I can both leverage and assist. I was always so focused on the business at hand that I neglected to take full advantage of the relationships that I had previously built or was currently building. In my new journey, LinkedIn has been a huge resource for me to **connect with, share, and learn from a dedicated community** around EVs. I've met so many interesting people who were willing to help me, teach me, and introduce me to their network. This has led to new customers, indispensable contacts within government groups, and a renewed sense of fulfillment.

Today, whenever someone reaches out to me on LinkedIn for advice, I make time to meet with them, even if it's obvious there isn't much in it for me. I do it to **give back** in the same way the community bootstrapped me.



Kayode Odeleye

Founder & CEO of Caena – UK

Realize this is a marathon, not a sprint. There will be lots of failure, lots of obstacles, lots of distractions, and a lot of pain. But it will be worth it in the end. This is one thing I wish I understood at the beginning – that I wasn't going to succeed in one go.

Related to that, I would have told myself to take care of myself. **Don't be too hard on yourself** trying to achieve business success because it is a long-term journey. I would be more relaxed. I would take care of myself and spend time on what matters instead of trying so hard to achieve milestones, which, in any case, keep moving and end up being less impactful than you think they will be.

So, that's a corollary to the fact that **it is a long, multi-year journey**. I now see entrepreneurship as a minimum 10-year horizon. But when I started out, I thought I could achieve significant success in as little as two years. That's not often true.



CAENA



Ophira Melamed

Co-Founder & CEO of NitroFix – Israel

1) **Embrace adaptability** in both roles and circumstances. Whether navigating evolving opportunities or unexpected challenges, flexibility is key.

2) **Trust in your vision** more confidently. When I founded NitroFix, I took a leap of faith, driven by the belief that it could be revolutionary. That same trust in my instincts and foresight is something I would encourage from the start.

3) **Emphasize building strong relationships** and cultivating a strong network of partners and colleagues, both within and outside the industry. Nurturing and maintaining these connections early can significantly impact long-term success.

4) **Be relentless in seeking opportunities for growth** – whether through the technical insights of senior colleagues or the personal experiences of team members. Every individual holds valuable perspectives that contribute to a more holistic understanding.

Ultimately, adaptability, confidence in your vision, and a commitment to learning will equip you to navigate and lead through any challenge that comes your way.





Nitin Kumar

Co-Founder of zbyte – USA



Avoid the temptation to build the whole product from the start. Instead, perfect one or two core features and sell them with intensity. It's more effective to get these right and make them indispensable to your target audience – rather than spreading yourself too thin.

As the product improves, so should its price. Raise prices regularly as you increase the value, rather than underpricing to attract traction that may not serve your long-term goals.

Quality matters, and that extends to both customers and revenue. Not every logo or dollar is created equal. Don't chase after low-quality traction just for vanity metrics or quick wins. Be selective about who you bring on as customers because they shape your product and your reputation.

Embrace unscalable practices early on. Do things that don't scale to truly understand your customers and refine your product. Once you know what works, scale the practices that add value. This approach helps to create a product with true market fit – rather than one that caters to a broad but shallow audience.

If I could do it all again, I'd **build smarter, iterate more often, and stay focused** on delivering value before scaling.



Efi Ben Artzy

Founder of Effective Improvement Global Ventures – Poland



Be a “lean” leader: align purpose, people, process, and problem-solving. Start with Eric Ries’ definition of a startup: “a human institution, designed to create a new product or service, under extreme conditions of uncertainty.”

The word “**human**” matters. My lean “sensei” used to say: “Great people make great products,” not vice versa. Evaluate if you can manage people, not just technology. Many founders neglect people as their most important resource, leading to dropouts, business issues, and even bankruptcy. After years of working with startups, I identified “Founder’s syndrome” – founders who think they know better than anyone. Don’t be this founder. Listen to your people, the “value creators,” who understand customers’ problems best.

The word “**institution**” matters too. It means startups, even at the seed stage, need processes. Eric Ries said, “Entrepreneurship is management.” It’s not an excuse for chaos. Founders must connect strategy, sales, product development, and operations through effective processes. Without this, growth isn’t possible.

Last but not least is the word “**uncertainty**.” Uncertainty defines startups. Startups are like war – “the realm of uncertainty” (Clausewitz). Crises like COVID-19 or the Ukraine War prove uncertainty can escalate. A good founder experiments to solve problems. Many startups fail because founders rush solutions, burning investments. Worse than a poor-quality product is one nobody wants or needs. Use scientific thinking – build, measure, learn – to develop an MVP (minimum viable product). Learning and experimentation are the keys to your success.

Make Products People Want: Ask yourself, what’s the best way to learn about customer needs? How will you integrate this into product development? What’s the minimum viable product you aim to achieve?

Solve a Real Problem: Is your startup solving a real-world problem? Can you define it as the gap between current and desired reality? Why is it a problem, and whose problem is it? How did you learn about it? Did you observe, interview, and gather data? Who are your competitors, and how do they address this problem? Here, I cannot put enough emphasis on the founder’s and team’s ability and willingness to truly understand customers – this is essential.

As the late Steve Jobs said: “You got to start with the customer’s experience, then go back to technology.” Many startups fail because they don’t understand their customers’ needs. I highly recommend finding the most creative ways to learn how customers experience problems in real life.



AJ Green

Founder & CEO of AI Advantage Agency – USA

Focus on iterating quickly, understanding that agility is crucial in this fast-moving digital world. Adapting to change quickly is key to navigating the constant shifts in technology and trends. **Building genuine relationships** opens doors and provides insights that you can't get elsewhere.

Staying curious and committed to learning keeps you in step with the latest advancements, while giving back through mentorship ensures **we all grow together**.



Damjana Pirnar

Co-Founder of Go4Panda – Slovenia

If I were to step back into the shoes of an entrepreneur, I would **immediately start actively seeking and being open to partnerships** – both formal and informal. Sometimes, it may seem that adding a partner to a project lowers your profit margin, but in the long run, it definitely creates more: more projects, more to offer the customer, you become more comprehensive, gain access to free knowledge, expand your business, and become more flexible ... the effects can be tremendous. So, I recommend **as much networking as possible**, even with seemingly competing companies.





Belén García de Pablos

Co-Founder of Blue Ocean leading drivers (BOLD) – Spain



Look actively for your goals instead of settling. This is valid anytime, but mainly if you're young and have fewer responsibilities: seek your goals. Change companies, countries, careers ... **seek whatever makes you feel fulfilled** and what you're passionate about. But most of all – don't trap yourself in a position that won't let you grow, and try to reevaluate where you are periodically.

But what happens if you're already "trapped"? Well, **you're stronger than you probably think**. Change and overcoming challenges are an inevitable part of life. Think back to how many times you had to fight and adapt already. Remember, you possess the strength and resilience to navigate any obstacle that comes your way. Believe in yourself, tap into your inner resources, and you'll be amazed at what you can achieve. This doesn't mean you don't have to plan, but be aware that life happens and sometimes things don't go as planned. Every so often, **a backup plan is better than a roadmap**.

Age is just a number. It doesn't define your potential or limit your possibilities. Whether you're looking to switch careers, start a business, or pursue a long-held dream, **it's never too late to make a fresh start**.

Life is a journey of constant growth and evolution. **Don't be afraid to reinvent yourself** as often as necessary. Whether it's a career change, a new hobby, or a personal transformation, embracing change can lead to incredible opportunities and self-fulfillment. Don't let fear prevent you from doing what you know you can do.



MG Gurbaxani

Co-Founder & CEO of Cuvama – UK



- 1) **Don't do it alone:** Find people who not only share the vision but balance out your weaknesses – ideally a co-founder who is your yin-yang. Having a supportive partner who can cheer you on and keep you grounded is gold. You need people in your corner who believe in the mission as much as you do and who can also call you out on your BS.
- 2) **Obsess over solving your customer's problem:** Your first handful of customers has a disproportionate impact on your trajectory. Invest in building deep, authentic relationships with them and go above and beyond, asking yourself, "How can we better solve their problem?" Make your early customers feel special – they are part of the journey and have stuck their necks out to take a bet on you.
- 3) **Don't fight the current:** I've learned that the path you envision isn't always the path you'll end up taking. Sometimes, it's better to ride the wave instead of fighting against it. In the early days – be flexible, and trust that the journey will reveal opportunities you might not have considered.
- 4) **Take care of yourself:** Having "work-life balance" is aspirational when you're starting out, but there are practical ways to achieve "work-life integration." Make time for things that recharge you – I'm unapologetic about lunchtime yoga, weekly golf, and family time. You'll need that energy to keep pushing forward.

At the end of the day, building a business is full of surprises, challenges, and moments of pure exhaustion, but with the right mindset and support, the growth is worth every bit of the struggle. I'd remind myself to **enjoy the ride** a little more too – because it's a wild one!



Lam Lin

Co-Founder of iisopack Technology – China



- 1) **Act on Good Ideas:** The most important step is turning your ideas into action. While it's tempting to overthink and worry, real progress comes from taking concrete steps. Don't let hesitation hold you back – act decisively and learn as you go.
- 2) **Trust Your Industry Choices:** Choose industries that align with your passions and strengths. Your deep understanding and enthusiasm will drive success more effectively than following trends or external pressures. Focus on areas where you can leverage your expertise.
- 3) **Challenge Self-Imposed Limits:** Many of the obstacles you perceive are self-created. Most fears are imagined, not real barriers. Face these challenges head-on and stay focused on your goals. Persistence and resilience will help you overcome these self-imposed limits.
- 4) **Keep Learning and Adapting:** The business world is dynamic. Stay curious and be ready to adapt your strategies. Learn from both successes and failures – and continuously refine your approach while remaining true to your core mission.

By focusing on action, trusting your industry choices, overcoming self-imposed fears, and embracing continuous learning, you'll navigate your entrepreneurial journey more effectively.



Sheena D. Franklin

Founder & CEO of K'ept Health – USA



First, determine what type of business, product, and industry you can truly be committed to, and set your North Star as a founder and for the company. Use that to build knowledge and influence in your chosen industry. Everything else is secondary – you will receive both great and bad advice, and you will have to pivot and pause on your journey, but **having industry knowledge will always give you a sense of direction.**



Andreas Gallasch

CEO at Software Factory – Germany



If I were to start my career over again with all the knowledge and experience I have today, I would always put people first, never question my approach to success, and ultimately focus on personal commitment.

Put People First: Seek out mentors and be willing to mentor others. Collaboration and knowledge sharing accelerate personal and professional growth. Stay customer-focused. Always keep the customer of your service in mind. Creating value for the customer is the key to developing successful products and services – and therefore to success. Develop and maintain a strong professional network. Connections open doors to new opportunities and collaborations.

Attitude for Success: Don't be afraid to innovate and take calculated risks. The greatest progress can be made by stepping out of your comfort zone. Continually seek out new knowledge and skills. The technology industry evolves rapidly, and it's important to stay current. This also means working outside regular hours and going the extra mile. Be open to change and adapt to new technologies and methods. Flexibility leads to innovative solutions and professional growth. Finally, develop a strong problem-solving mindset. Understanding and overcoming complex challenges will set you apart in your field.

Personal Commitment: The above points are always in addition to the job itself. They ensure a healthy balance between work and personal life. This balance is critical to long-term success and well-being. This does not mean working strictly nine-to-five, but it does mean putting your own spiritual and personal interests ahead of success – success that will come anyway.



Victoria De Mercadante

Founder of Victoria's Luxury Services – UAE



Trust the Process and Stay Patient: Success doesn't come overnight. Each setback is a lesson, and each delay is preparing you for the next step. Be patient and trust the process.

Relationships Are Gold: Cultivating strong, meaningful relationships can open more doors than any strategy or business plan. People are the foundation of success. Nurture those connections and lead with empathy and transparency.

Adaptability is Power: The world is constantly changing. Stay open to new ideas and be willing to pivot when necessary. Clinging to rigid plans only limits growth. Keep evolving.

Balance Is Everything: Burnout is real, and it can kill your motivation. Protect your well-being – mentally, emotionally, and physically. The journey is long, so pace yourself.

Embrace Failure: Every failure is a stepping stone. Don't fear it – embrace it. It's often in moments of defeat that you learn your most valuable lessons.

Lastly, **invest in yourself:** Lifelong learning and personal development are non-negotiable. These are the cornerstones of a fulfilling journey.

By following these, I'd walk my path with more confidence, clarity, and resilience.



Marko Udovč

Founder of REVESTUM Real Estate Agency and Investments – Slovenia



Never give up. There is always sunshine after the rain. Just remember to persevere and work hard, and a positive result will definitely follow. Have discipline, because only through persistent work can progress be made.

Educate yourself as much as you can. Knowledge is the key to success and a competitive advantage. Always **stand by your word**.

Invest in the visibility of the company – it's no use being excellent in your field if no one knows about you. The main ingredient of business is people. Nurture friendships, client contacts, socialize, and **create genuine relationships** as much as possible.



Cornelia Kawann

Founder & CEO of energy-on! – Switzerland



Manage your energy, not your time. Energy is our most valuable currency, which we trade for everything we think, do, believe, and decide. It is the game changer. Especially because, when you have little energy, you are in survival mode. However, when you have abundant energy, you see so many more opportunities, and you even have the energy to execute them – to make them happen. That's when you perceive life and your business as easier and experience more joy.



Tom Martin

Group CEO at HEALM – Australia



- 1) **Embrace Failure:** Understand that failure is not the end but rather a stepping stone to success. Learn from your mistakes, adapt, and keep moving forward.
- 2) **Focus on Value:** Always prioritize providing value to your customers or clients. Building strong relationships and delivering quality products or services will be your foundation for long-term success.
- 3) **Continuous Learning:** Stay curious and never stop learning. The business world is constantly evolving, so it's essential to stay informed about industry trends, technologies, and best practices.
- 4) **Build a Strong Team:** Surround yourself with talented and dedicated individuals who share your vision and values. Building a strong team is crucial for scaling your business and overcoming challenges.
- 5) **Resilience and Persistence:** Entrepreneurship is a rollercoaster ride with its ups and downs. Stay resilient, stay persistent, and never lose sight of your goals, even during the toughest times.
- 6) **Network and Seek Mentorship:** Networking is key in business. Build relationships with other entrepreneurs, mentors, and industry experts who can offer guidance, support, and valuable insights along your journey.
- 7) **Balance and Well-being:** Remember to prioritize your well-being and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Burnout can be detrimental to both you and your business, so make sure to take care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally.



Luka Banović

Co-Founder of Hummble – Slovenia

The advice I'd offer to my younger self would echo the insights shared by Alex Hormozi. Business is all too often compared to a race. People think you can win at it. In reality, it's much more akin to a marriage. How do you win in marriage? By staying married. It's the same in business. **You win by staying in it** and being able to make a living from it, and maybe some others around you too.



Rafał Trzeciak

CEO at SmartDust.me – Poland

Never sugarcoat the startup life. It only attracts stowaways. Build with people you can trust with your life. Funding is just a high-risk, high-rate loan. Celebrate every victory. Don't let a bad day, week, or month distract you from your progress. Focus on your personal growth daily. Cherish every person walking this path with you!





Mirko Lampe

Founder of IIoT GUIDANCE | Co-Founder & CEO of iMouse Solutions – Germany

IIoT PROJECTS



Start a business very early. Learn, fail, and learn again as early as possible. At the heart of any entrepreneurial journey is embracing failure. Failure is not the end – it's a stepping stone. **Learn from mistakes, adapt swiftly, and keep moving forward.** This mindset is crucial in today's fast-paced, international tech landscape.

Surround yourself with a strong, like-minded network. Find mentors and peers who challenge you, provide guidance, and foster growth. In the startup world, **collaboration is key**, and having the right people around you can make all the difference.

Always be in learning mode. Whether through books, courses, or staying on top of global tech trends, **continuous learning keeps you sharp.** Invest in yourself – this is a long-term commitment to both personal and professional development. At the same time, never lose sight of your customers. They should be at the center of everything you do. Happy customers drive repeat business and referrals. By prioritizing their experience and needs, you're setting up your company for sustainable, long-term success.

Also, **enjoy the process.** Celebrate every milestone, no matter how small. Building a business isn't just about hitting the big goals – it's about the lessons learned, personal growth, and finding joy in the journey.

Finally, **you only live once.** Do outdoor sports, enjoy nature, and become part of it by traveling and exploring the world.



Primož Cigoj

Founder & CEO of PC7 & PandaChat – Slovenia



Entering the world of entrepreneurship is exciting but also full of challenges. To succeed, it's important to keep in mind a few key pieces of advice that have helped many experienced entrepreneurs.

First, **build on mutual respect**. Whether you're leading a small team or running a large company, people are your greatest asset. Lead with empathy and openness, listen to your colleagues and customers, and foster transparent relationships. Trust within your team and quality relationships will guide you through both good and difficult times.

Second, **maintain a long-term vision**. In entrepreneurship, you will face many obstacles, but it's crucial that problems along the way don't discourage you. Instead, see them as challenges that teach you and make you stronger. Success is not a destination but a process. Don't let temporary setbacks frighten you – what matters is staying true to your vision and moving forward.

Third, **be ready for continuous learning and adaptation**. The world is constantly changing, technologies are advancing, and markets are evolving. As an entrepreneur, you need to be flexible and open to new opportunities. Educate yourself, follow trends, and don't be too attached to one approach. The most successful entrepreneurs are those who can adjust their strategy in response to changes around them.

It's also important **not to forget about yourself** – entrepreneurship is a marathon, not a sprint. Maintain a balance between work and personal life, as long-term success will require your persistence, creativity, and, most importantly, your well-being.

With respect, vision, and a willingness to embrace change, you will build a strong foundation for a successful and fulfilling entrepreneurial journey.



Shahd Abdelhadi

Co-Founder of Women Who Invest – UAE

The road ahead is tough – that's why not many take it. There will be moments when you want to give up, when you can't see a way forward, and when you wonder how you even got here. But remember, it's easier to criticize than to create. That's why the creators are few, but the critics are many. Still, **the ones who create are the ones who make a difference.** When people tell you that you're inspiring, that they're grateful for what you do, and that you've made their lives easier, you'll understand the power of your journey.

As you move forward, be clear on your values, and never, ever compromise on them. **Your values will guide you** when the path gets hard, and they will define the impact you leave behind. **The path is long, but the rewards are sweet.** Keep going, because the difference you're making is greater than you realize. One day, you'll look back on every drop of blood, sweat, and tear, and say – it wasn't so bad after all.



Nik Primc

Co-Founder & CEO of Elinor – Slovenia

In business, lingering issues can grow into bigger problems if not addressed swiftly. Being agile allows you to respond quickly to challenges, adapt strategies, and maintain momentum. **The faster you act on what's not working, the more resilient and efficient your business will be.**

Your co-founders will be your closest partners on the entrepreneurial journey, so it's critical to choose wisely. Align on values, vision, and work ethic to ensure a solid foundation. A great co-founder complements your strengths and brings balance to the leadership dynamic. **Passion is the driving force that sustains a business during tough times.** If you're passionate about your work, it fuels your persistence, creativity, and enthusiasm. It's important to have a genuine connection to your business to inspire both yourself and your team.

elinor



Robert Lee Goodman

Founder, CEO & Chief ImpleMentor of CEO RESOURCE – USA



Three days after earning my MBA, I quit my job and started my own company. My action plan included the goal to “Raise Investor Capital.” However, I did not realize how incredibly naïve I was when it came to actually implementing this existential step. Looking back, I wish the experienced version of me could have shared these Top 10 Lessons with the new entrepreneur me:

- 1) **Improve your financial projections** – because if they’re wrong, your runway is wrong, your capital raise amount is wrong, your breakeven date is wrong, etc.
- 2) **Your financial projections are almost always wrong** because your driving assumptions are almost always wrong.
- 3) **Get knowledgeable, experienced help early** – and never, ever use “cheap talent” who has never run a startup or raised investor capital from strangers.
- 4) **If you’re raising capital, start preparing ASAP** because your runway is shorter than you think. A lot shorter.
- 5) **It takes money to raise money.** It takes a lot of money.
- 6) **Ideas are a dime a dozen.** Success is about a believable and achievable business plan, having a team that can execute it, and convincing investors that your plan is right.
- 7) **You will need to get in front of a massive number of suspects** to legally end up with enough qualified prospects and, ultimately, investors who will actually stroke the check.
- 8) **Verbal commitments and promises to invest often evaporate** when you ask for the check. Don’t slow down on your fundraising until every penny is deposited in the escrow account.
- 9) **Make raising investor capital your top priority** from day one by dedicating sufficient time, energy, effort, and money to it.
- 10) If you don’t raise the funding, probably everything else you’ve done for your startup won’t matter. **Do Whatever It Takes to Succeed with Your Raise!**



Michaela Tzvetanova

Founder of Qalb Communications Agency – Bulgaria



First of all, I would advise myself to **prioritize continuous learning and personal growth**. It is essential to stay curious, be open to new ideas, and not be afraid to seek knowledge from others. Creating a strong support system and learning from others provides valuable insights and opportunities for change.

I would also like to **emphasize the importance of resilience and perseverance**. There may be times of setbacks and challenges along the way, but it's vital to understand the need to stay persistent and keep pushing forward toward what you truly envision. Embracing failure as a learning opportunity and staying resilient in the face of adversity is the key to long-term success. The thing that mostly keeps me grounded and happy is a healthy work-life balance. The way I have done this is by growing healthy habits and daily rituals that give clarity and peace of mind. I always start my mornings with antioxidants – a shot of celery or noni juice and organic alkaline tea. I spend a short time meditating and organizing my weekly schedule in advance. This needs to start at a young age. Postponing is the worst thing a person can do. Having the allocated time for everything ensures that everything goes a certain way. Wellness is one of the most important things to me – a key pillar for maintaining a prosperous life. I am an advocate for a holistic wellness approach.

Lastly, I would remind myself to **stay true to my values and be supportive of others**. Aligning my actions with my core beliefs and pursuing work that energizes and fulfills me is vital for long-term growth. All of these principles serve as a solid foundation for a successful and fulfilling journey.

To summarize:

- 1) Network and meet great and amazing people who inspire you.
- 2) Read more books and be well educated.
- 3) Organize and schedule your time.
- 4) Separate work, personal time, and family time.
- 5) Focus on specific goals and be consistent.
- 6) Make sure you have positive people around you, people who inspire you and who will support you.



Ana Garcia

Founder & CEO of Elite Fablane Luxury – Spain



I would certainly emphasize the importance of heeding my inner voice and advise my younger self to **embrace rejection and failure without fear**, exude and embody confidence consistently, and persevere unwaveringly in the face of adversity. Central to this counsel would be the notion that unwavering self-belief is paramount in life, alongside the steadfast commitment to **never allow anyone to surpass my efforts**, regardless of the circumstances. I would underscore the significance of maintaining momentum and standing resolutely grounded in my convictions – a principle I have always upheld.

In life and in the professional world, it is a common occurrence for individuals to perceive others through the lens of their own needs for validation, often leading to judgments based on personal perspectives rather than objective truths. It is essential to **remain steadfast in your beliefs** about your capabilities and identity, regardless of external perceptions. Those who have truly succeeded will guide rather than criticize, while those who feign success tend to be critical and opinionated. Surround yourself with individuals who embody wisdom, values, respect, and loyalty towards others. **Stay true to yourself**, keep moving forward confidently, and wish them well.



Rafael Masters

Co-Founder & CEO of Vulcan Augmetics – Vietnam



VULCAN AUGMETICS

Do every job yourself first. Hire slow and fire fast. Learn your users, then become the audience you target to build a better product. Get an accountant early. Find a niche and own it without distraction.

That pretty much sums it up. Also, the age-old adage: **success is 90% just showing up – repeatedly.**



Ana Mineva

Co-Founder & CEO of DGLegacy® – Germany

dlegacy

If I had to start my journey all over again, I would remind myself of several important things:

"Firstly, Ana, continue to firmly believe in your idea and the necessity of a service like DGLegacy. **Stay true to your vision and mission**, and do not be deterred by fleeting trends or sudden shifts in direction. The journey might offer many paths, but there is only one ultimate goal – the desired North Star.

Listen only to your own sound judgment and to your users, avoiding the opinions of those who can't walk in your shoes or who aren't DGLegacy's target customers. Their views can only serve to distract and deplete your energy.

Trust in the process of being agile and patient. Achieving success is a marathon, not a sprint. It requires both persistence and meticulous attention to detail.

Building a strong network from the beginning is crucial. It will prove invaluable when least expected. **Relationships play a significant role** in both personal growth and professional development.

Lastly, but certainly not least, securing a seasoned coach or mentor as soon as possible is paramount. The **entrepreneurial path is fraught with 'distorted mirrors'** – misleading reflections of reality, especially when you're bringing something truly innovative to the table. A mentor can guide you through these illusions, helping you remain true to yourself and your mission."



Rasha Aburas

Founder & CEO of The Daily ME | Co-Founder of Arrive – UAE

Looking back with the knowledge I now possess, I realize that many things would be drastically different. My first piece of advice is to **prioritize rest**. Entrepreneurship can be overwhelming, so it's crucial to take meaningful breaks where you completely disconnect from work – no emails, no laptop. Recharging properly is essential for maintaining long-term productivity.

Another key lesson is that **what gets written gets done**. Define your big vision and keep it front and center as a constant reminder of why you started this journey. Once that vision is clear, break it down into long-term and short-term goals. This not only gives you direction but also makes the path forward much more manageable.

Time is one of your most valuable assets. When you experience setbacks, rise quickly – don't linger in self-doubt. It's equally important to know your priorities and focus on what truly matters. Remember, things don't have to be perfect. Progress is better than perfection.

Never stop learning. Seek advice from mentors, peers, and those who have walked a similar path before you. Entrepreneurship is a continuous learning experience, and being open to new knowledge will only strengthen your ability to adapt.

Lastly, **practice self-compassion**. Don't be too hard on yourself when things don't go as planned. The entrepreneurial journey is filled with challenges, and being kind to yourself is just as important as the hard work you put into your business.



THE DAILY ME





Neja Gozdnikar

Co-Founder & CEO of Open Pledge – Croatia



Trust people to do their job well, but always check what they have actually done. **You can't do everything – delegation is crucial!** However, regular oversight is essential to ensure that outcomes align with expectations and standards. This approach not only helps catch any discrepancies or errors early but also provides an opportunity for ongoing feedback and guidance, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and mutual respect.

Also, don't expect perfection from anyone. **We are all just humans**, so lower your expectations and lead people to achieve what you have imagined. Never assume they understood the task exactly as you thought they would. **Communication is key to success**, and it begins with you.



Alexey Grebennikov

Co-Founder & CEO of Aionys – Bulgaria



Be flexible and open to change above all. The tech industry is constantly evolving, so it's crucial to be ready for continuous learning and adaptation. I would also advise myself **not to fear taking risks** and experimenting – sometimes, the most unexpected moves can lead to the greatest successes. Additionally, it's important to remember the value of teamwork and to develop leadership and team motivation skills.



Bettina Kaemmerer

Founder & CEO of Bee-Comp – UK



My journey started in February 2022. That is when I decided that going back to working for a huge corporation was no longer right for me. I consulted with peers from the industry and other entrepreneurs I know to find out if what I was planning to do was the right thing for me, as what I do is very niche. Bee-Comp was born! What I would change now is:

- 1) Ask anyone you know in your network for support to get your name out there and network, network, network! **Growing your network is important to getting recognized.** I also joined a couple of networking groups.
- 2) **Your pitch needs to be spot-on.** It took me nearly six months to get my pitch right! If someone in the supermarket asks you what you do, you should be able to answer in 20 seconds.
- 3) **Have your business plan checked by an expert** and define a clear and compelling value proposition. Your financial plan should be realistic but ambitious.
- 4) **Understand that failure is part of the journey.** You'll make mistakes, face setbacks, and encounter roadblocks. What matters is how you learn from those experiences, adapt, and continue pushing forward. Resilience and grit are key to overcoming challenges.
- 5) **Look for areas that you can expand into.** I started to get invited to podcasts and webinars, which – surprise, surprise – I really enjoy doing. Watch your competition to see what their offering is!

Best advice: Get an accountant to do your bookkeeping and HMRC filings. That takes a lot of stress away. You should focus on growing your business, not tax rules (unless that is your business).

Super important: Find time to look after yourself. For me, that is doing sport, crossword puzzles, and spending quality time with friends.

Enjoy the journey! Best of luck to all of you!



Michele Wong

Founder of ESG Access | Managing Director at MLW Consultancy – UAE

The first piece of advice I would give myself is this: 90% or more of what we worry about and feel anxious over is often just a product of our imagination. These **fears and doubts tend to cloud our judgment**, distract us from the present moment, and create unnecessary stress. I've learned that most of these worries never materialize. By focusing on the here and now, we can make clearer, more confident decisions that align with our true purpose. This realization was so impactful in my life that I wrote about it in my memoir, "Feminine Reclaimed".

Another crucial lesson I've come to understand is that **career success and making money, while important, are not everything**. It's easy to get caught up in the pursuit of professional achievements and financial gain, but it's essential to remember that these are only one part of a fulfilling life. **Balance is key**. I've seen time and again that those who reach the end of their lives often express regret – not about the deals they didn't close or the promotions they didn't receive – but about the time they didn't spend with the people they love. They reflect on how their greatest moments and accomplishments are intertwined with deep personal connections, not with their careers. This sentiment is also a central theme in "Feminine Reclaimed", where I explore the importance of aligning our lives with our deepest values and the most authentic parts of ourselves.

Finally, for those on the entrepreneurial path, one more piece of advice: **make sure you truly love what you do**. Entrepreneurship comes with countless challenges, and it's this love and passion for your work that will sustain you through the tough times. While this may be less critical for employees, who might find satisfaction in different aspects of their roles, for entrepreneurs, doing what you love every day is essential. It's the driving force that will keep you motivated and resilient in the face of adversity.



MLW CONSULTANCY

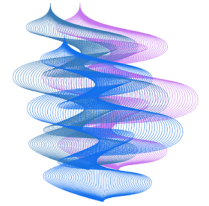


Marko Pavičić

Founder of Unity Method – Croatia

I would advise myself the following: **Work in sales**, either as a door-to-door salesman or as a telemarketer. It's the best way to lose the fear of rejection and public speaking. **Travel to places** with vibrant tech communities. **Network** through meetups, conferences, and workshops wherever you can. Your network = your net worth. **Organize your knowledge** into a methodology that you can replicate with every new work position or company you start.

Connect with new people daily and weekly on LinkedIn and find a mentor! **Share content** on social media around your core skills. **Ask for feedback** regularly – don't wait for others to offer it. **Invest in reading books** like "Think and Grow Rich" and "How to Win Friends and Influence People". **Build a habit** of connecting with people throughout your career and life. You never know who can help you.



Anas Ben Lassoued

Owner & CEO of Musiek SA ETS – Tunisia

Firstly, build a team with individuals who **excel in communication**, ensuring that everyone is on the same page. Secondly, choose to surround yourself with people who not only uplift you with positive energy but also support the financial aspects of your work.

Additionally, keep critical business insights and strategies confidential, sharing them only with trusted members within your circle. As a businessman with a long-term vision, **focus on building a strong and well-structured hierarchy** within the company to support its growth and stability.





Katerina Hayes

Founder & CEO of Naked Kimchi & Co | Founder of MyFounders.Club |
Angel investor & Ambassador at Mint Ventures – UK



Starting my ventures was a transformative journey that brought invaluable lessons and insights. Reflecting on this experience, there are a few key pieces of advice I would give my younger self, armed with the knowledge and wisdom gained along the way.

Firstly, I would **emphasize the importance of trusting your intuition**. In the early stages, I often allowed the opinions of others – whether they were coaches, mentors, or peers – to overshadow my inner voice. While external advice can be valuable, it's crucial to remember that everyone's perspective is shaped by their unique experiences. Your intuition is your most reliable compass in navigating through the noise of subjective opinions. **Be bold enough to stand your ground**, knowing that growth and learning often come from taking risks and making decisions that align with your inner truth.



One of the most powerful realizations I had was that my disabilities – ADHD and dyslexia – are not limitations but superpowers. For too long, I allowed them to define and restrict me. However, embracing these aspects of myself has been key to my growth. If I could start again, I would advise myself to seek therapy sooner. Therapy allowed me to **connect with my deeper self, uncovering an inner strength** that has been instrumental in my entrepreneurial journey. This inner work transformed my approach, enabling me to create a more significant impact through my ventures.

Moreover, **financial intelligence and mindset are fundamental to business success**. The fear of growth and success is often deeply rooted in our upbringing and can subconsciously influence our decisions. Understanding this and consistently working on my mindset has been crucial. In my experience, 99% of business success comes from mindset, with only 1% being the business framework. When mentoring others, I focus on mindset first, as it sets the foundation for everything else.

As for tech – Create a Minimum Sellable Product. Sell before you build!

Finally, always approach entrepreneurship with the intention to create value. Fall in love with the problem you're solving, and continuously educate yourself. **Align your passion with your purpose**, and success will naturally follow.



Julia Pehtereva

Co-Founder of TE-D (Tara Energy Drink) – Latvia



“Better Done Than Perfect” – This has become one of my strongest beliefs and the first piece of advice I give to anyone just starting out. Early on, when my startup was just taking shape, I handled the product design, logo, and visuals. As a perfectionist, it was either “perfect” or “nothing.” I believed that if something wasn’t flawless, it wasn’t worth showing. This mindset, however, held me back. Many tasks were delayed or never even started because I feared they wouldn’t be perfect.

Now I realize that “perfect” simply doesn’t exist. Show me one thing in this world that’s truly perfect! **Perfection is, in a way, the death of growth.** Once something is “perfect,” there’s no development afterwards. It’s already perfect, which means it doesn’t need to be redone, refined, or improved. But when you’re creating something, especially for the first time, you have to accept that it will go through many changes. Even giants like Coca-Cola have changed their iconic logo several times.

This idea doesn’t just apply to big things like branding, logos, or USPs. Even with something as standard as a contract, like an NDA, you will make many amendments and additions as you grow, and everything will “grow” and adjust with you. Believe me, ask any startup owner – have they ever seen a perfect NDA in their life? I can almost guarantee the answer is no! It simply doesn’t exist. **Every business has unique needs**, whether related to the industry, intellectual property, or specific patents.

So, what’s my point? There’s nothing perfect in this world, but something imperfect, yet at least done, is already an excellent start for further corrections and refinements. Please, don’t be like me back then – don’t waste time and procrastinate in search of the perfect solution. Instead, take a sheet and start writing, sketching, brainstorming, or recording your thoughts! **Take action, put pen to paper, and start creating.** You can always improve it later, but the key is to begin.



Alicia Zurita Negro

Founder & CEO of Lubets – Spain

lubets
ORGASMO UNIVERSAL

If I were starting over as an entrepreneur, I would tell myself **to constantly give myself advice**. Incorporate meditation into your routine; it helps you gain clarity and creativity while keeping you zen! **Take care of yourself**, give yourself time to disconnect, and treat problems as challenges without stressing yourself. Remember that every adversity is a learning opportunity, so take advantage of it!

Look for mentors and have faith in yourself and your project, even if sometimes you need to be a little critical to improve. **Focus on growing your business sustainably**, and seek investors only when you truly need them. And don't forget to have someone on your team to handle the finances so you can focus on creativity. Above all, **enjoy what you do!** That's key!



Andrei Kamarouski

Co-Founder & CEO of Pythia – USA



Be as brave as you can, and don't assume you can't do something until you've tried and failed. **Don't overplan** – many things are easier to accomplish than they initially seem.



Cristian Dina

Co-Founder of Tekpon – USA

tekpon

If I were starting my journey again, knowing what I know now, I would offer myself four key pieces of advice:

- 1) **Finding a mentor early on is crucial.** A mentor provides a wealth of experience, offering guidance that can help you navigate challenges more strategically. Learning from someone who has already walked the path you're on saves time and accelerates growth. Throughout my journey, I've seen the immense value of having someone to turn to for advice, perspective, and support.
- 2) I would **emphasize building a personal brand.** In the modern business world, especially in the SaaS and tech industries, visibility and credibility are paramount. By establishing a presence early through content creation, thought leadership, and networking, you can position yourself as an authority in your field. I would've started earlier on LinkedIn and other platforms, sharing insights and engaging with the community, as this not only opens doors but also builds lasting professional relationships.
- 3) I would tell myself to **embrace failure.** Early in my career, I often feared mistakes, but I've since learned that failure is an integral part of growth. Every setback comes with lessons that can fuel future success. Rather than seeing failure as a roadblock, I would've encouraged myself to treat it as an opportunity to pivot, learn, and refine my approach. The path to success is often riddled with challenges, and each one offers valuable experience.
- 4) I'd remind myself to **stay relentlessly curious.** The tech landscape is ever-changing, and keeping up with it requires constant learning. I've found that innovation often stems from a curious mindset – asking questions, exploring new trends, and staying eager to learn. Whether it's the latest SaaS tool or a new digital marketing strategy, curiosity keeps you ahead of the curve and allows you to anticipate industry shifts.

With these four pillars – **mentorship, personal branding, embracing failure, and curiosity** – my journey would have been more streamlined, impactful, and fulfilling from the start.



Hasret Smajlović

Founder of Techdio – Denmark



Success in business hinges on the strength and cohesion of the team you assemble. I would focus on hiring individuals who are energetic, driven, and prepared to excel even during tough times. **A great team doesn't just follow orders;** they ask questions, challenge assumptions, and ensure that every decision aligns with the best interests of the business. This creates a dynamic environment where innovation thrives.

Establishing clear goals is equally crucial. Each team member should have specific targets and deadlines, fostering a sense of purpose and accountability. When everyone is aligned with common objectives, the team moves cohesively toward a shared vision, propelling the business forward.

To maintain focus and efficiency, **I would recommend outsourcing non-core tasks from the start.** Areas such as accounting, marketing, web design, or international sales can often be handled more effectively by external experts, particularly in regions where costs are lower. Leveraging freelancers for these tasks not only boosts productivity but also reduces costs. While it isn't necessary to rely solely on freelancers, utilizing them strategically can be a smart move in the early stages. As the business grows, transitioning to full-time or part-time employees becomes more viable. Hire and fire. Don't be afraid to let people go if they don't perform.

It's also important to **build a strong company culture from the beginning.** Regular in-office interactions are essential in the first year to create a cohesive team. While remote work has its benefits, it can sometimes weaken team bonds during this critical period.

I would **seek out experts who have already achieved success in the market.** Bringing them on board as consultants or contractors allows you to tap into their knowledge and insights, accelerating growth. Investing in sales and marketing is crucial as your business starts generating revenue. If no one knows about your business or product, even the best offering won't sell.

The key takeaway is to **focus on your team's core strengths and delegate other tasks.** By building a strong, goal-oriented team and strategically using external talent, your business can overcome challenges and thrive. With the right strategy, clear direction, and motivated people, achieving great things is within reach. And one last thing – to build a successful business, **be prepared to work hard** for around five years. Nothing comes overnight.



Pilar Stella

Founder of Stellina Partners – UAE



- 1) **It starts with you.** Work on yourself through the journey. Don't try to get more degrees, more external validations, or approvals. Find ways to build yourself, your skills, your tools, your network – and most importantly, your own inner self-worth and joy along the journey. From there, you will be able to better discern the right people and opportunities that come your way.
- 2) **It's not about what you do, it's about who you do it with.** Make sure you like the people you surround yourself with. If they block progress, complain, don't take responsibility, and you find yourself fixing and saving everyone and everything, it's time to level up. Surround yourself with people where the energy exchange is equal and uplifting.
- 3) I get a lot of questions, particularly from women in their early to mid-thirties, struggling with getting further up in organizations and feeling burned out. **I always recommend a few things:**
 - a. Give to your client/employer, yet also make sure you are building your own resources and toolboxes along the way.
 - b. Try being an expat somewhere globally. This can provide access to much higher levels more quickly and help you level up faster.
 - c. Build your plan B while working on your plan A.

P.S. These tips apply to men too.

Finally, lighten up, have more fun, be kind to yourself, be kind to others, take things less seriously, take breaks, travel, meet cool people, and be your authentic self. Find tools and resources outside of work to heal – exercise, breathwork, yoga, meditation, dance, swimming, or whatever **activities to have fun and create more space to heal, grow and thrive.**



Andrii Bezuglyi

Co-Founder of Implex – Poland



Implex

Engineering your dreams...

Well, I have several pieces of advice, to be honest.

- 1) You should start your business in your 30s or later, without waiting for any “sign” or “wisdom.” At this age, you already know enough to be a professional in some area where you can create value. **Don’t waste the most productive period of your life hesitating** about whether you are good enough or not.
- 2) **Be optimistic and avoid overthinking** potential failures. You will definitely make many mistakes, but it’s part of the journey. Every failure gives you experience. Just ensure you have a plan B for the riskiest decisions to mitigate the impact.
- 3) **Meet people and establish good relationships** with them. Try to get acquainted with as many people as you can, and help them if they need it, even if it costs you something. You’ll see in the future how it pays off and how unexpectedly your old contacts become your most valuable assets.



Slava Hraichenko

Co-Founder & CEO of Implex – Poland



Implex

Engineering your dreams...

My key advice would be to **prioritize building a strong team** and to **embrace failure** as a learning opportunity. Find an excellent partner, be flexible, **maintain a healthy work-life balance**, set yourself up for the long haul, and be fully prepared to seize luck when it comes.



Julia Draghici

Co-Founder & CEO of CPV One – Romania



Don't hide! Even if you're an introvert and the idea of being in a big crowd makes you feel awkward, put yourself out there. People buy from people – that's sooo true! No matter how amazing your product is, having a face behind it boosts credibility and trust.

So, **step away from the computer every now and then** and get out there. The people you meet are just like you – they want to connect! It's not as scary as it seems. Attend podcasts, go to conferences, and be a speaker at events – even if it feels super scary! You'll grow so much from those experiences.

In the first two years as a founder, I didn't put myself out there or network. I stayed behind the scenes, focusing only on building the product. Looking back, I wish I had done things differently. Meeting people, sharing your story, and **connecting with others in the industry is so important.**

Another thing I would tell myself is to **create procedures as you grow and delegate responsibilities** once you have the resources. It's good to understand what each part of your company does, but it's even more important to trust your team and lead them.

As we build CPV One, our ad tracker, I've **learned the importance of helping** as part of what you do. In our case, we help performance marketers make sense of their data. For me, helping others is very important – it makes me feel great.

So, my advice is simple: **don't be afraid to show up and be seen.** You'll be amazed at the doors that open when you do!



Shayma Kurz

Founder & CEO of digital advice consulting – UAE

digital **advice**
CONSULTING

- 1) **Start early with entrepreneurship** – sooner than I did: The earlier you start, the more time you have to experiment, learn, and grow. Starting young gives you a head start in gaining valuable experience, understanding market dynamics, and building resilience. You also gain the flexibility to take more risks and pivot as needed. If I could go back, I would encourage myself to dive in without hesitation and learn from every step along the way.
- 2) **Believe in yourself**: There will be moments of doubt and times when it feels like the odds are against you. However, confidence in your own abilities and trusting your intuition are critical from the start. I would advise myself to embrace self-belief, knowing that I have the strength and insight to overcome challenges and make impactful decisions. Confidence fuels progress and inspires others to believe in you too.
- 3) **Consistency is crucial**: Success doesn't come overnight, and progress requires sustained effort over time. By showing up, working diligently, and maintaining a steady commitment to your goals, you build the foundation for long-term success. Consistency in execution and decision-making helps create momentum and establishes trust with clients, partners, and your team.

In summary, if I could give my younger self advice, it would be to **start early with entrepreneurship, believe in yourself, and remain consistent**. These principles have been the foundation of my journey and would have given me even more confidence as I built my company.



Felisa Vicente

Founder of Movehability – UK



Learn how to prioritise yourself without guilt. Whether in your career, relationships, or personal growth, this mindset is the game-changer most people miss. For years, I used to think putting myself last was noble – it meant I was dedicated, hardworking, and selfless. But over time, I realised that constantly giving to others without recharging my own energy left me exhausted and ineffective. This goes for everything: career, relationships, and health. You can't pour from an empty cup. When I started prioritising myself, everything shifted. In my career, I stopped saying yes to every opportunity out of fear and started choosing the ones that aligned with my long-term goals. That alone skyrocketed my progress. My health improved because I made time to move, eat well, and sleep, no matter how busy life got. I stopped burning out because I established boundaries that protected my time and energy.

Here's what's key: **prioritising yourself doesn't mean you neglect others.** It's the opposite – it means you show up as your best self for those around you. Whether that's in your career, your family life, or your friendships, people get the best of you when you're operating from a place of strength and balance. The tough part is letting go of the guilt that comes with choosing yourself. Society conditions us to believe that we should always be on the go, always serving others first. But the reality is, sustainable success – comes from a foundation of well-being. So, if there's one thing you take away, let it be this: **make your health, growth, and happiness a priority.** When you do, everything else will fall into place more effortlessly than you ever imagined.

One of the most impactful lessons I've learned is the **value of investing in mentors and coaches.** If you want to fast-track your progress in any area – having a mentor or coach can make all the difference. For a long time, I thought I could figure everything out on my own. I believed that hard work and perseverance were all I needed. But after years of trial and error, I realised that I was limiting my potential by trying to go at it solo. The moment I started investing in mentors, everything changed. A good mentor or coach brings experience and perspective that you just can't gain on your own. They've walked the path you're on and can point out shortcuts and help you avoid common mistakes. Whether I was navigating a business decision or figuring out my own health and fitness, having someone in my corner who had already been there was invaluable. It gave me clarity, confidence, and, most importantly, accountability.

The beauty of mentorship isn't just about learning specific skills – **it's about shifting your mindset.** A coach will challenge your limiting beliefs, push you beyond your comfort zone, and help you see your potential in ways you hadn't before. That's something you can't put a price on. I've also found that when you invest in a coach, you're committing to yourself. You're telling yourself that your goals are important enough to warrant expert guidance. That shift alone – **knowing you're worth the investment** – can change your entire approach to success. So, if you're serious about levelling up in any area of your life, I can't stress enough how valuable it is to find a mentor or coach. You'll save time, avoid unnecessary setbacks, and reach your goals faster than you ever would on your own. The right guidance can turn potential into results, and that's an investment worth making every time.



Surprise Potgieter

Founder & CEO of Sisur Media – UAE

Experience is crucial for successful implementation, while creativity fuels the drive to lead you toward what you are destined for. Our world offers unprecedented access to knowledge, so leverage this advantage. **Networking is vital** for personal and organizational growth. Stay committed to your vision and mission, and trust that the right path will unfold. Act with compassion, embrace your individuality, and build your personal brand. **Never ignore your intuition** and always think infinitely.



Michael Zankl

CEO at Embers Call Center & Marketing – Germany

Always be yourself. You live and work primarily for yourself. Pay attention to what you enjoy or what you're good at, because when you enjoy something and take pleasure in it, you'll also be successful. And then you can fully stand behind what you do. Don't worry if something doesn't work today, and don't be concerned if progress is slow tomorrow. Soon you will achieve what you've set out to do. And consider whether what you've achieved is not much better than what you initially planned, especially if the outcome is different from what you envisioned.





Matjaž Dover

Co-Founder of Roakon – Slovenia



The most important advice I would give myself is to **prioritize continuous learning and personal growth**. The business world evolves rapidly, and success isn't just about having the best idea – it's about how adaptable and open you are to learning new things.

Looking back, I realize that the most valuable asset an entrepreneur can cultivate is the ability to **embrace new knowledge** and constantly seek out new perspectives. I would remind myself to stay curious, to never become complacent, and to always be open to discovering new ways of thinking, whether it's through exploring unfamiliar industries, connecting with different people, or testing innovative business models.

One of the key insights I would emphasize is the importance of being proactive in learning – not just when things go wrong, but as a daily practice. By **continuously expanding your knowledge**, you'll be able to make better decisions, foresee potential challenges, and seize opportunities that others may overlook. Technology, of course, plays a significant role in this process, but what matters more is your personal commitment to growth.

If I could go back, I would make it a point to remind myself that every step, **whether a success or failure, is a learning opportunity**. This mindset not only fuels innovation but also helps build resilience and adaptability – two essential traits for any entrepreneur.

In conclusion, the advice I'd give my younger self is simple: **keep learning, stay curious, and never stop evolving**. The more you invest in personal growth, the more you'll unlock your true potential and build a business that can thrive in an ever-changing world.



Jens Eide Solvang

Co-Founder & CEO of Vengell & Scoutlly – Norway

Vengell

Scoutlly

Bet on yourself, but don't rush the process! Early on, I was eager to achieve success quickly, to move fast and hit milestones. But the biggest growth didn't come from the victories – it came from the setbacks, the failures, and the quiet moments in between.

I'd remind myself that **patience is just as important as ambition**. Success isn't about racing to the finish line; it's about building a foundation that can withstand storms.

Invest in relationships. Business is often painted as a numbers game, but people – your team, mentors, and even your competitors – are the real currency. Some of the best opportunities in my career didn't come from a plan or a strategy. They came from the people I took the time to connect with, understand, and support. Don't just network – build genuine, meaningful connections, and never be afraid to ask for help.

Take care of your mental and physical health. Burnout isn't a badge of honour. There were times I pushed too hard, thinking that being relentless would equate to success. It doesn't. If you don't protect your energy and well-being, you won't be able to give your best, no matter how talented or driven you are.

Lastly, **trust your gut**. You'll have moments where you doubt yourself, especially when the path isn't clear. But if I could go back, I'd trust myself more. Every big breakthrough happened when I stepped outside the box, ignored the noise, and followed my own intuition. There will always be noise; learn to tune it out and **follow the voice that matters – yours**.

Starting over, I'd still embrace the challenges, but I'd approach them with more balance, patience, and belief in myself. Because in the end, **it's the journey that defines you**, not just the destination.



Hiren Sanghvi

Founder & CEO of Syndell Technologies – India



Emphasize the critical importance of establishing robust processes early on. While the initial stages of business growth can feel overwhelming, having clear, scalable processes creates the foundation for sustainable expansion. It's not just about working harder – it's about building systems that work smarter.

Equally vital is the art of building an exceptional team. I've learned that a company's true strength lies not in individual brilliance but in collective excellence. Invest time in finding people who not only possess the right skills but also align with your vision and values. **Your team is your most valuable asset; treat them as such.**

One of my most transformative realizations was the power of networking with like-minded individuals. Success rarely happens in isolation. **Cultivate meaningful relationships** within your industry, join relevant communities, and never underestimate the value of shared experiences and mutual support.

I would also advise my younger self to **master the art of delegation** sooner. As leaders, we often feel compelled to maintain control over every aspect of our business. However, true leadership means trusting your team and focusing your energy where it matters most. Effective delegation isn't about giving up control – it's about **empowering others and maximizing collective potential.**

Perhaps most importantly, I would stress the fundamental principle that has guided my most successful decisions: **staying client-centric.** In today's competitive landscape, understanding and exceeding client expectations isn't just good practice – it's essential for survival and growth. Your clients' success is your success.

Remember, **every challenge you face is an opportunity to learn and grow.** Stay humble, remain adaptable, and never stop evolving. The journey of entrepreneurship is a marathon, not a sprint – pace yourself accordingly and celebrate each milestone along the way.



Maja Švener

Co-Founder & CEO of Orbs Lab – Slovenia



As a co-founder of PINK PANDA, which I helped grow from scratch before my exit in 2021, there's one key lesson I'd like to share: **always have a Plan A, Plan B, and Plan C**. When I started, e-commerce was still in its early stages in Slovenia, and we faced numerous uncertainties. For every major decision, I learned to **prepare multiple scenarios**. Plan A is your ideal outcome, Plan B is for setbacks, and Plan C is for the worst-case scenario. This approach equips you with the flexibility to adapt and reduces the emotional stress that comes with navigating tough situations.

Today, as a co-founder of ORBS Lab, I help other companies achieve even more than I did, and this is one of the first pieces of advice I give to young entrepreneurs. **Being prepared for different outcomes** not only provides peace of mind but also allows you to make confident, strategic decisions.

If I could give one piece of advice to my younger self, it would be to adopt this habit even earlier. It's not just about risk management – it's about being proactive and prepared. For anyone starting their business journey: **anticipate the unexpected and be ready to pivot**. Your ability to adapt is often the key to long-term success.



Simon Fee

Founder of FeeFi & Ravers In Dubai – UAE



- 1) **Know your limits**, both in time and knowledge. When you need expertise, don't hesitate to seek it – it will add value to your work, not take it away.
- 2) Make it a priority to take a week off every three months to **recharge**.
- 3) Avoid following the crowd; **trust your instincts**. Mistakes are inevitable, and that's perfectly okay – learn from them.
- 4) And always **take the time to listen** to those with more experience than you.





Connor Olivier

Founder & CEO of OTP Media – South Africa



If I had to give myself advice from when I was starting a couple of years ago, I would give myself the following points:

- 1) The most important point: **you need to find a mentor in the field you want to progress in**, who will help shape your paradigm and perception of your life and help direct you. A mentor can be as simple as indulging in and taking in all the information you can possibly find on the internet revolving around a guy who is already successful in your field. Before I found my current mentor (for which I am truly grateful, thanks Michal!), I took in as much information as I could from this guy called Charlie Morgan (one of the smartest guys I've ever known). He helped shape my perception and paradigm on how I want to earn money and direct my career in the future. He has provided me with an invaluable wealth of knowledge. While learning this information, you can search for a mentor in your space. I found my current mentor by actually DMing him on LinkedIn! Who would have known!
- 2) **Don't waste your energy on all the useless things.** A few years ago, I picked up practically every self-help skill you could possibly try to improve productivity, so I was meditating every day, had a productivity tracker to give myself scores, was doing red light only after 6 pm, no phone in my room the whole day, eating only whole foods, and journalling every evening. Don't get me wrong, these skills are all very important and helped shape me in the direction I wanted to go. They were all, in a sense, needed to help me become disciplined and have the ability to work hard, but they all added extra stress to my life. I figured out that all these extra unnecessary things helped distract me and took away from the finite energy you have each day. You only have 100 units of energy each day, let's say, and instead of devoting all of that energy towards doing the work that would actually leverage change, you waste a lot of energy on doing unnecessary things, which, in a sense, hinder your work.



Alistair Chegwidden

Founder of Amplify X – Australia



Start with consistency, not perfection! When I first began, I was hesitant to post on platforms like X and LinkedIn, worried about every small detail. I feared judgment, mistakes, and the unknown. But now, after growing from 0 followers and clients to over 4,000 connections, I've learned the key is to simply show up every single day. The audience builds over time – not overnight.

In the beginning, I would have focused on small, consistent actions rather than waiting until everything was perfect. I'd tell myself, "**Don't overthink it.**" Your progress comes from showing up and doing the work, not from getting everything right on the first try." Perfectionism can paralyze progress, but consistency breeds results.

I'd also advise myself to **embrace the long game.** Building a business, growing an audience, or achieving any goal is a marathon – not a sprint. I would remind myself that small daily efforts compound over time and lead to big rewards. Be patient and trust the process.

Lastly, I'd remind myself to **engage with people genuinely.** Success isn't just about gaining followers or clients; it's about building meaningful relationships. Respond to comments, answer questions, and be someone people can count on.

So, if I could do it all again, I'd remember: **You'll be amazed at how far this alone can take you.** Show up every day, be consistent, and focus on building authentic connections.



Coco Thamm

Founder of EMPIRE OF LOVE – Germany



- 1) You are a once-in-a-lifetime event. Live up to this!
- 2) Health is your superpower! Treat yourself well every day!
- 3) You're a winner the moment you wake up on this side of the grass!
- 4) Enjoy existence! Celebrate being alive! Stay humble and full of grace for everything you have!
- 5) You're human – behave like one! Treat everyone and everything with the same respect!
- 6) Family & friends are treasures! Spend time with the people you love as much as you can! Cherish your roots!
- 7) Live your wildest dreams! Reach out for help if needed! Everything is possible!
- 8) You're on a mission for good. Always! Bring to life what your soul desires!
- 9) Love yourself before everyone else does!
- 10) Show your true self. Inspire others! Be vulnerable – for that's your greatest power!
- 11) Lead by example! Take full responsibility! Be a role model! You go first!
- 12) Be a friend to truth! Speak your truth! Live by your values! Be a voice, not an echo!
- 13) Be love! What else matters? Create impact – People, Planet, Profit! That's the way we roll!
- 14) Be of service! If you can change somebody's life for the best: Go!
- 15) Treat your clients like lovers. They'll love you back. We all need more of that!
- 16) Vision: What do you really want? Create from abundance and love instead of scarcity!
- 17) Laugh often – don't worry at all! Nothing is worth jeopardizing your peace of mind!
- 18) Create! Be happy! Believe in magic! You are magic! Just do it!
- 19) Build your life by reverse engineering. Who and where do you want to be in the end? Act now as your future self! The ultimate goal is being happy and looking back at a life full of gifts while taking your last breath!
- 20) Dance and sing like there is no tomorrow. Be in the present moment – always.



Carl Rodrigues

Founder of Joining the Dots – UK



Your thoughts are more powerful than your actions. They create your reality. Thoughts in the conscious mind are creative and logical. They are what you are aware of. Thoughts in the subconscious mind drive our habits and behaviors and are much less visible. 95% of our day is controlled by the subconscious mind. The most empowering thing you can do is to gain awareness of your subconscious programming and reprogram it.

In my experience, PSYCH-K® has been the most effective way to access and change my subconscious programming, which in turn has changed my reality. It has allowed me to design and shape the life I truly want. You still need to **take action and work through resistance** – but the tools are now available to speed you along your hero's journey.



Valeska Rimele

Founder & CEO of Zavemo – Slovenia



- 1) Small everyday habits matter more than big, one-off actions. That's why it's important to **build a routine** with smaller goals.
- 2) Critical thinking, problem-solving, and abstract thinking must **continuously be developed**.
- 3) **Be mindful** of the people you surround yourself with.
- 4) **Trust your instincts** – but keep your eyes wide open.
- 5) **Do the best you can** with the time and resources you have; striving for perfection will only slow you down.
- 6) **Don't sprint** – entrepreneurship is a marathon that requires not just speed but also endurance.



Adriane Niepel

Founder of Ninja Adventures – Germany



- 1) Everything starts with one decision. Learn to decide!
- 2) You have choices everywhere. You are not a victim. Take the responsibility for your life.
- 3) You don't need to be understood by everyone. The only person who knows everything about you is YOU, so it is fully OK that some will not see the big picture. Accept that! Don't try to explain yourself for everything.
- 4) Learn from small children to be fully yourself and find a way back to you!
- 5) Don't create pressure to find a long-term vision. There are two ways to be successful: Focus on the end result, the goal, the vision to create momentum OR focus on the path, the way of learning, growing, and staying happy. With both ways, you can be successful! This can also change from time to time, so choose what is helpful for you in the next time period.
- 6) Without passion, there is no genius! Go show it and infect others with your energy!
- 7) If you have multiple passions, use them for your motivation and for creating an outstanding business or personal brand. No one is like you!
- 8) You are more than one job title. Go with all your passions. Find a way or make one! You can be a pioneer or whatever you want.
- 9) Fear is only a sign of which direction there is currently the most possible self-development. Choose if you want to go over it or stay where you are. Both have their time.
- 10) Be clear about your values when choosing partners in business and private life. People matching your values are the important people for feedback. Don't give feedback a voice to people not matching your values!
- 11) Create positive vibes and energy to start. Just go with the flow, create an agile plan, and find your own money-creating path – experiment, inspect, learn, and adapt.
- 12) Step out of your own shadow! You are great, you are loved, so don't hold yourself back! The magic starts within you!



Hosea Pwakodikai

Co-Founder of Medical Identification – Nigeria



Start with the problem, not the solution: It's tempting to be driven by the excitement of a new idea or technology. But even the best technology doesn't matter if it's not solving a real, pressing problem. Engage with potential users before even thinking about the product. Understanding the problem from their perspective ensures that what you build is relevant and provides real value – which will ultimately drive the success of your startup.

Validate early and be ready to pivot: It's easy to get attached to your idea and believe you know exactly what the market needs. However, nothing is more powerful than hearing directly from your target audience. It can give you invaluable feedback. No matter how much you believe in your idea, you must be flexible enough to pivot when the data and feedback tell you something different. The first idea doesn't have to be the final product.

Surround yourself with the right people: If I were starting again, I would remind myself of the importance of surrounding myself with the right people – people who are not only skilled but also share the same vision and passion. A great team doesn't just bring expertise; they bring energy, support, and resilience when times get tough. Building a startup is not a solo journey, and the people you bring on board can make or break your success. Make sure to invest even more time in building and nurturing those relationships from the start.

Embrace failure as part of the process: Failure is not an exception – it's part of the journey. Embrace failure, not fear it. Setbacks can feel like the end of the road. But looking back, I realize that each failure was a stepping stone toward refining the product and growing as a leader. Failure often teaches us things that success can't. It forces you to examine what went wrong, make changes, and come back stronger. Failure is not a reflection of your worth or ability; it's just feedback. The key is to fail fast, learn from it, and keep moving forward.

Patience and persistence are key: Be patient. Building a successful business takes time – much longer than you expect. Persistence is just as important as having a good idea. Startups don't grow overnight, and some of the most successful companies have taken years to build. Staying consistent, continuing to push forward, and keeping your eye on the long-term goal is what will ultimately get you there. Slow progress is still progress, and sometimes the most important thing is to just keep going, even when things feel like they're moving too slowly.

Customer-centric mindset is everything: Focus on maintaining a customer-centric mindset. The more we engaged with our users, the more we realized that their input was critical to shaping the features and direction of the product. Ultimately, a successful business is not about what you think is best – it's about what solves your customers' problems. Focus on listening more, adapting quickly to customer feedback, and ensuring the product is always evolving based on their needs.

Self-care is non-negotiable: When you're deeply passionate about your work, it's easy to lose balance and neglect your health. But burnout can set you back more than any external obstacle. Set boundaries, take breaks when needed, and prioritize both mental and physical well-being. Building a startup is a marathon, not a sprint. To stay in the game long enough to succeed, you need to ensure that you're at your best – not just as a leader but as a person.



Alex Seagull

Founder & CEO of Obriy Design Büro – Ukraine



Embrace every challenge as a growth opportunity and prioritize meaningful networking. One of the most valuable lessons I've learned on my journey is that a **problem equals an opportunity**. It all comes down to how you perceive the situation. In any project, business, or even life itself, challenges are inevitable. Instead of getting frustrated – for example, by a dissatisfied client – it's more productive to treat the situation as a chance to improve your product or business processes. This mindset not only drives growth and development but also builds adaptability. It nurtures the ability to face difficulties head-on and see them as stepping stones toward bigger success.

Networking is not just about communication – it's an essential part of your capital. It's not just about having people to help solve your problems, but about creating a web of connections that can be mutually beneficial. People from different fields and backgrounds can bring diverse perspectives, ideas, and opportunities, just as you can offer the same to them. It's this reciprocal nature of **networking that can lead to new possibilities**, collaborations, and even unexpected breakthroughs. The broader your network, the greater your chances of encountering the right opportunities at the right time – whether it's to bring an idea to life or to navigate through complex situations.

Ultimately, I would emphasize the importance of **embracing challenges as catalysts for growth** and viewing networking as a way to create meaningful, mutually beneficial connections. Together, these principles form a solid foundation for achieving sustained progress and realizing ambitious goals.



Ervin Prislan

Founder of Product Hub & Conversion Design – Slovenia

- 1) If you are the smartest and most successful person in a room with your friends, you are doing something wrong.
- 2) Remember the face, name, and what they do if you share similar interests with them.
- 3) Make a lot of mistakes – but never the same one twice.
- 4) Every decision you make in life should consider whether it improves your life, and if not, what the consequences are.
- 5) Staying on one project for a longer period is much more valuable in terms of knowledge than switching between 2–3 projects at a time.
- 6) Discipline over motivation.



Salman Rajput

Founder of Cadogan Asset Management – UK

My advice to budding entrepreneurs is simply this: You have no safety net of a salary when you go down this path. So **make sure that you have a decent pot available for the beginning**, and be prepared for when things go wrong, which they certainly will!





Tammy L. Michelle Scarlett

Founder of White Lotus Global Initiative – USA



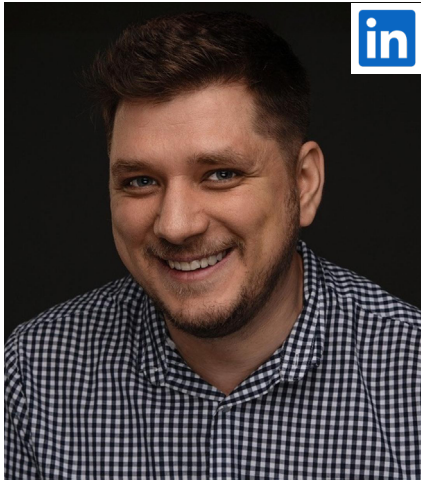
If I were starting my journey again today and I had the opportunity for my now self to speak with my younger self, I would take my younger self's hands, look her in the eyes, and tell her:

"You are not separate from everything around you. You are innately, intimately connected with the world you were born into – every part. Your intuition is both your operating manual and your survival/thriving guide; befriend her often and fall in love with her. Her voice is quiet and requires a trained ear, so make a daily practice of listening for her whispers.

Now do the same with your precious body. She is your custom-crafted embodiment of every level of magic, miracle, and manifestation you could ever dream of creating. **Learn how to hear her.** She carries the wisdom and stories of your ancestors along with the possibilities of the cosmos, and she is your miraculously capable and faithful collaborator. The more deeply you form your relationship with her, the more easefully and agilely you will glide through this life.

Your time is your asset, and it is more malleable than you think. Play with it. Decide to love every minute for the gift that it is. Your body and the earth both hold intelligence you don't yet understand. But they speak each other's language. Connect with nature to better understand yourself, life, and how to be and relate with yourself, each other, and the world around you.

Make the journey lighter by laying down guilt and shame. They are helpful informants but make terrible house guests. When they come, thank them and let them be on their way. A mentor, Yvonne Bryght, once told me, 'If you fight for your limitations, you get to keep them.' It's true. You might as well unfasten and **release that cloak of self-judgment** you've become accustomed to. It hides all your best qualities and no one has to bear its weight but you. Let it slip off your shoulders and feel what is possible for you in the full freedom, abundance, and connectedness that is your birthright."



Alexander Benkendorf

Founder & CEO of Benkendorf Group – Latvia

BENKENDORF
design & development group

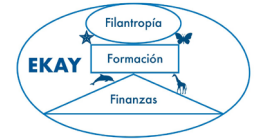
My advice to my younger self would focus on building smarter relationships in life.

- 1) **Actively seek out mentors who have already achieved what you're aiming for.** Their experience will be invaluable, and they can guide you in ways you can't imagine. But don't stop there – find mentees, people striving to reach where you are. Helping them isn't just about giving back; it's about growing yourself too.
- 2) **Surround yourself with people who energize you.** Find communities of like-minded, constructive individuals who lift each other up. There are countless groups of ambitious people who support one another, and you'll gain as much as you give in those circles. The more you help, the more help will come your way – often from unexpected places.
- 3) **Live an active life, and interesting things will happen.** You'll have stories to share. Travel, volunteer, and get into sports. Challenge yourself – learn to enjoy discomfort. Only by embracing it can you train your brain to stop avoiding challenges and start thriving in them.
- 4) **Treat everyone you meet like they're already your friend,** and mentally wish them happiness. This mindset opens doors you didn't even know were there. Whether at an event or in daily life, don't be afraid to ask for help. Most people will say yes – especially if they see you're serious, genuinely interested, and willing to invest in the relationship.
- 5) At the end of the day, it's all about engaging constructively with interesting, ambitious people while becoming competent and interesting yourself. That's where the magic happens, and **your growth will naturally follow.**



Elena Yepes Evangelista

Founder of Ekay 2020 | Financial Advisor & Wealth Manager at Quadriga Asset Management – Spain



- 1) **Find a mentor, counselor, or sponsor.** It is essential to have an experienced, high-profile person who can provide (i) honest feedback and (ii) key contacts to help develop my business. This is a preliminary and crucial effort that should be made at the beginning of the process to assess and validate all the previous work done to create the project.
- 2) **Focus on the core of the project.** It is important to avoid early diversification “just for testing” and to pay full attention to the mindset, which is a key aspect of achieving success at every stage of the project.
- 3) **Combine a long-term strategic vision** with short-term tactical reviews.
- 4) **Foster strong self-trust in the face of failures.** It is also essential to exercise consistent prudence when closing big deals. When things are going well, we should slow down and make some adjustments.
- 5) **Take short daily breaks.** Spending a few minutes to pause, focus on breathing, meditate, or simply close your eyes can be very beneficial.
- 6) Dedicate at least 45 minutes a day to physical activity or sports training.
- 7) Once you know the price-value of your product or service, **avoid accepting lower rates** – accepting lower prices can lead to a loss of authority and confidence in your project.
- 8) **Be grateful** to your mentor and generous to your team.



Priya M. Nair

Founder & CEO of zwag Ai Solutions – UAE

The Next Generation Ai



- 1) **Focus on product development and getting it to the market as early as possible.** This ensures testing the product and gaining valuable feedback from users. Launch sooner, fail faster, iterate, and launch again. Marketing, exhibitions, etc., can wait.
- 2) **Have conviction in your product and vision.** Don't be discouraged by competition or get distracted by superstar founders who announce fundraising milestones. Build a sustainable legacy business. Unicorns are a myth, and you cannot build a winning product overnight anyway. Pivoting is good for startups, but make sure you are pivoting for the right reason. Don't lose sight of your why and how.
- 3) **Learn cash flow management.** Sales and cash flow are all that matter when it comes to investor confidence and survival. Make sure all transactions are documented and contracts are in place. Set up KPIs and measure your progress regularly, even when you are small. Your data room with all auditable information will be a lifesaver.



Miha Štefančič

Founder of The Friday Reading – Slovenia

The
Friday
Reading

Be infinitely curious and patient. Be bold, and don't be afraid to make mistakes – mistakes offer the best learning. Take calculated risks; no risk, no glory. Listen to your intuition – it often tells you more than numbers and risk calculations. Sacrifice and hard work are part of the career journey and will always pay off. Success belongs not to the one with the best idea, but to the one who brings the idea to life.



Doha Gazel

Co-Founder of Gazels Group – Egypt



GAZELS GROUP

My advice for startups, as an entrepreneur and co-founder – mostly concerns internal issues within a start-up. Here is the external dimension of the problems an entrepreneur has to face: No one said that running a business is easy, but in most cases, my recommendations will help entrepreneurs succeed.

Here are a few points that are especially important:

- 1) **Identify customers:** Nothing is more important than customers and their needs. Market research aims to seek their opinions and revise your product. It is much easier to sell your products to existing customers than to new ones due to the strong bonds of trust built over time.
- 2) **Draw up an Effective Business Strategy:** A business plan is better described as a business roadmap. This explains where one is going, how they intend to get there, and the financial expectations along the way. It's advisable to keep coming back to the business plan and reshaping it in accordance with ongoing changes in the business situation.
- 3) **Get Ready to Change:** Businesses can hardly survive without change. That is why the business owner has to be ready to change directions. Venturing into new baby items markets, for instance, by changing the product designs or even introducing modern technology, helps the business remain competitive.
- 4) **Control Overheads:** Actively and accurately record transactions, control costs, and prepare a financial plan. One of the major aspects of running a business is understanding cash. Be sure to have some cash available for running expenses, especially during the off-peak season.
- 5) **Develop Human Capital:** Employees are what make a company valuable. Create a wonderful working environment, provide training, and allow friendly interactions.
- 6) **Establish a Proper Digital Marketing Strategy:** Competing online is essential in the modern marketing concept. Do not hesitate to design a high-quality, impressive, professional business site.

In summary, thoughtful business advice is a powerful tool for entrepreneurs. By prioritizing customer needs, fostering adaptability, managing finances, investing in your team, and staying informed, you can pave the way for lasting success.



Nuha Gazel

Founder & CEO of Gazels Group – Egypt | Founder of GPRO – UAE

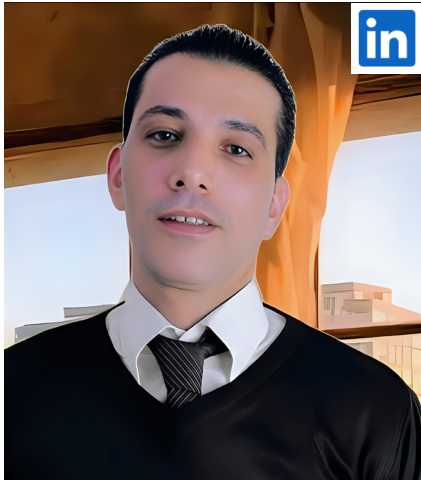
As a serial entrepreneur and visionary investor, when I look back at the various experiences I've gone through and how they have contributed to my approach to doing business, I realize that if history were to repeat itself and I was fortunate enough to come into contact with my past self, then I would say the following:

- 1) **Avoid multitasking** – it won't make you more productive. In the end, it all boils down to focus. Always remember to concentrate your energy on a few things that you will do well, instead of many that you will do poorly.
- 2) **Create a deep connection**. Build genuine relationships with customers, partners, and employees. In business, all relationships are built on trust – that's why we have to create strong relationships.
- 3) **Don't be afraid to share responsibilities**. Give work to others to do and lead them to do it well. Delegation of responsibilities reduces the burden on an individual and develops the organizational culture.
- 4) **Give yourself permission to be selfish**. It's not optional to take care of yourself. Take care of things like mental exercise, physical exercise, and psychological exercise, as entrepreneurs are key to the success of an organization.
- 5) **Learn from your mistakes**. For every mistake you make, there is something to learn from it – and that is the importance of creativity and strength. Mistakes have to be looked at as learning experiences.



GAZELS GROUP





Selim Wahdan

CEO at GPRO – UAE



Reflecting on my journey through the realms of events and production, I am compelled to impart these insights to my former self, should the hands of time grant me the chance – all of which can apply to entrepreneurship as well:

- 1) **Focus on detail:** No matter the kinds of events and production undertakings, there is a secret – every detail matters. Measuring every factor, from setting the event venue to the event theme itself, is crucial to creating the event and making it unforgettable. Never let the tiniest details be overlooked.
- 2) **Learn to Communicate Effectively:** The failure of any event can be caused by poor communication. Ensure that your team, together with the partners and even the clients, are always on the same page. Open communication is a source of assurance and prevents hiccups during implementation.
- 3) **Learn to be Flexible:** Everything in the events business is never static. Be flexible enough to embrace change and ready to adjust plans when some things do not go according to expectation. Challenges can spawn solutions.
- 4) **Learn to Create Good Bonds:** Events and production do not occur in a vacuum. It is important to develop good networks with suppliers, sponsors, and other parties involved in the events. Treat them with care, as they will be the pillars that hold any event together successfully.
- 5) **Create New Things:** Any kind of development or growth cannot be achieved without change. Change should be encouraged, and growth approaches must be left open.



Sebastian Konkol

Co-Founder of Sport Vision Technology – Poland

Aim high and go global. In many cases, people limit themselves – thinking that they are not good enough, that their ideas are inferior, and that they won't be able to build what they dream of. When I opened my first company, I thought it would be enough to do a local business in my home country. In fact, I didn't think about whether it was worth it to get customers from outside my hometown. I didn't realize what harm I was doing to myself by doing so. Aiming low, I didn't understand that by thinking only in terms of local business, I was artificially limiting my base of business partners, customers, and, above all, my experience to a small, closed group of people. In doing so, I was denying myself the opportunity to gain new perspectives on doing business. It was a discovery for me that business is done differently – differently in Poland, differently in the UK, and differently in Qatar. I would never have understood that working only in the local market.

In conclusion, if you want to build a business, never do it locally. If you want to find customers, look for them globally. **No one can afford to think small.**



Sašo Nožič Serini

Founder & CEO of DigitAgro – Slovenia

Persevere, even when everyone tells you that you lack experience, that you should accept your situation, that you're too old, or that this isn't for you... that you should be realistic. **Keep dreaming, keep working, and keep pushing forward.** When a million doors close on you, move ahead and never turn back. Hold tight to your highest goals, because in the end, you will succeed.

The voices that try to bring you down – claiming they wish you well and urging you to stay grounded – are really reflections of their own fear and limitations, not yours. Stay strong, and eventually, their words will fade in the glow of your success, disappearing like the morning mist. **Don't wait or hesitate** – just do it, and the rest will follow!





Tracy Tilbury

Founder of Pink Pepper – South Africa



Focus on building relationships, because they are the foundation of everything. Whether in hospitality, marketing, or business development, relationships are at the heart of success. I've learned that while skills and strategies evolve, the connections you make and nurture are what drive real, lasting impact.

In my time building Pink Pepper, my greatest gift has been sharing my passion for hospitality and marketing with people. Early on, I thought it was about creating a product or service that stood out. And while that's important, what I've come to realize is that **people remember how you make them feel**. It's about building trust, showing empathy, and always delivering more than what's expected. Those personal touches transform an ordinary interaction into something truly remarkable. This has been the guiding principle in both my business and personal life.

I'd also tell myself to **prioritize adaptability and balance**. The landscape of any industry – especially hospitality and marketing – is always shifting. The ability to pivot and embrace change, while maintaining a steady focus on the bigger picture, is key to long-term success. Equally important is finding a work-life balance that sustains you. It's easy to get consumed by ambition, but burnout is real. I learned that creating space for personal growth and wellness isn't just important – it's essential to staying energized and inspired.

Lastly, I'd remind myself that **failure is part of the process**. Every setback I've experienced has taught me something valuable and pushed me to improve. Resilience is built by showing up every day, learning from mistakes, and continuing to push forward with passion and purpose.

Ultimately, it's the relationships you cultivate, the lessons you learn, and the balance you create that define success – **not just in your career, but in life**.



Daniel Titov

Co-Founder & CEO of ChicHub – USA

Start building your network immediately! People out there are the best source of advice.

In my journey, I've learned that the most valuable insights often come from the people we connect with. No book or online course can replace the wisdom gained through real conversations with those who've walked the path before us. When I was starting out, I thought I could figure everything out on my own. But when I began reaching out to others, I realized how much **collective knowledge was available** to me.

Take, for example, the story of Benjamin Franklin. He founded the Junto Club at the age of 21, bringing together a group of artisans and tradesmen for mutual improvement. This network became a powerhouse of ideas, leading to the establishment of public institutions like libraries and fire departments. Franklin understood that **collaboration could ignite innovation** far beyond individual capabilities.

When I started actively building my network, I was amazed at how doors began to open. Opportunities I hadn't even considered appeared, and challenges that seemed unsolvable became manageable with the advice and support of others. A mentor once told me, "**Your network is your net worth**" (original quote by Tim Sanders) – and those words couldn't be truer.

Networking isn't about collecting contacts – it's about **cultivating relationships**. It's about genuine curiosity and a willingness to both learn from and contribute to others. Engage in communities related to your interests, attend events, and don't be afraid to reach out to people you admire. The worst they can say is no, but more often than not, you'll find that people are surprisingly willing to share their experiences.

So don't wait. Start building your network today. The relationships you forge will become one of your most powerful tools for personal and professional development. **People out there are ready to help** – you just need to take the first step and reach out.





Mohamed Zakaria

Founder & CEO of Zak Architects – Egypt



If I could go back and give advice to my younger self, starting out in architecture, I'd say this: **focus more on the people around you**. Architecture isn't just about designing spaces – it's about building relationships. I didn't fully grasp early on how much of my success would depend on the connections I made, whether with clients, collaborators, or mentors. If I could do it again, I'd **invest more time in getting to know people** on a deeper level and learning from their experiences. These relationships shape your perspective and can open doors you didn't even know existed.

Another thing I'd emphasize is the **importance of resilience and flexibility**. When you're just starting out, it's easy to focus only on mastering technical skills, but what really matters over time is how adaptable you are. The industry is constantly changing, and you have to be ready to grow with it. I'd tell myself to see challenges as opportunities and to never shy away from taking on something new, even if it's uncomfortable. Those are the moments that make you better.

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, I'd remind myself that balance is key. Architecture can consume you if you let it, but it's so important to **protect your personal life and well-being**. Creativity and innovation come when you're grounded, not when you're burning out. So, take time to recharge, invest in yourself, and nurture the relationships that keep you steady.

If I had known about these things earlier, I think I would have been a lot more intentional about how I approached my career and life in general.



Mitja Jakopič

Franchise Owner of Network In Action Baltic – Latvia



- 1) **Focus on Solving Problems:** The most successful businesses are built around solving real problems for a specific group of people. Make sure your product or service addresses a clear pain point and provides a tangible solution.
- 2) **Understand Your Financials:** Pay close attention to cash flow, margins, and costs early on. Managing your finances effectively is crucial for long-term success. Keep a close eye on your runway, avoid unnecessary expenses, and build a strong financial buffer.
- 3) **Build a Strong Network:** Relationships matter. Focus on building a network of mentors, advisors, partners, and peers who can provide support, guidance, and opportunities. Surround yourself with people who inspire and challenge you – it will make a world of difference.
- 4) **Embrace Failure and Iterate:** Remember, failure is part of the process. Embrace mistakes, learn from them quickly, and iterate. Pivot when necessary, but don't be afraid of making wrong decisions – they're valuable learning opportunities.
- 5) **Take Care of Yourself:** Business can be consuming, but your personal well-being is essential for long-term success. Prioritize your physical and mental health, maintain work-life balance, and make time for rest and personal growth.



Tim Šfiligoj

Founder & CEO of 350life – Slovenia



From the first day outside the comfort zone – sending out a proposal, unsure if you're worthy of it. Selling things, even if you haven't mastered them, but knowing you can learn them in three sleepless nights and deliver. **Create a circle of entrepreneurial people who understand this world.** Friends, parents, and relatives often don't understand, and all comments are negative or have a negative connotation. Have a circle that understands, encourages, and helps you believe. Block out that negative external noise.

Over-deliver. I still over-deliver to everyone after 5+ years. I don't watch every hour, nor do I charge for it. I always look for ways to deliver more and impress – so they will remember working with me.

Consistency. All the successful entrepreneurs I know (like it or not) are always there. Yesterday, I received a call at 7 PM in my home gym. I finished training, went to work until 11 PM, and got it done. And I didn't even need to respond – many people wouldn't. If you think that one month of effort followed by two months of rest/slacking will get you somewhere... it very likely won't.



Uroš Ferlin

Founder & Brand Strategist at Time Hacking & FACT – Slovenia

3 things I would like to share with my younger self – and you:

- 1) **Your biggest weakness is your biggest strength:** Do not be afraid of your weaknesses – they are here for a reason. I was born with dyslexia, and at the age of 40, I realized that dyslexic thinking is my biggest strength in business. We are all born with dyslexia, which means our right side of the brain (the creative and intuitive side) is more active than the left side (the logical and linear side). Throughout life, the left side of the brain normally becomes more dominant. A dyslexic person simply does not let the left side of the brain control the right side. And yes, the 21st century is the century of dyslexic thinking.
- 2) **The key to efficiency is being present:** Be present in whatever you do. I believe the more present we are, the more effective we can be, and the easier our work becomes. In my life, I have discovered many formulas, pieces of wisdom, solutions, hacks, ideas, and advice about how to become more effective and productive. The main problem in modern society is that, on average, we spend only 3% of our time “on pilot” and 97% of our time “on autopilot.” I have spoken to more than 3,500 successful people about how they manage their time. There is one common thing that appeared: the ability to be present – to be here in the moment. So, train your “muscle” to be more of a pilot of your time by becoming more present.
- 3) **Never stop learning about yourself:** Be yourself in whatever you do. The quality of your life is determined by who you are becoming, not by what you have done. Never stop exploring yourself. The purpose of life is to realize who you truly are. You are a unique human with specific potential.





Sharene Lee

Co-Founder & COO of Takadao – Saudi Arabia



The journey is going to be long and difficult. You will run out of money, people will quit on you, customers will abandon you, and the market will shift and make what you do redundant. Most of your failures will not be your fault, but some of them will be. Own it. **Every failure is a learning opportunity**, and you must work through them to get to success. This is why you need to seek out failure in order to succeed. Collect failures like trophies. And even with experience, people still make mistakes because the landscape in which an entrepreneur inhabits is ever-shifting, always changing. Listen to others always – especially those with lived experiences – but **trust your gut** because you know your business best; nobody has all the pieces of the puzzle but you.

Money is always going to be a problem, so watch it like a hawk. Even when you're flush with cash, spend cautiously and strategically. Pay for people, pay for time – everything else is secondary. Identify your core competencies and make sure you control them in-house; never outsource your core competencies. Outsource what is necessary, and don't spend on what is unnecessary.

Which brings me to focus. Entrepreneurs are full of bright ideas, and the temptation is great to continually launch new initiatives. There is a fine balance between testing new things that can move your business forward and losing focus on your primary mission. To this end, write out and internalize your vision and mission statement, and check everything you do against it. Make sure you understand and embody the culture you want your company to have, and check everything you do against it. These serve as your decision-making matrix and help you stay focused. **The loss of focus is costly** both in time and money. Your job is to make good decisions rapidly to enable your team to work towards achieving the company's goals. Everyone must be rowing in the same direction to move forward. Good decisions are not always the correct decisions. Making the incorrect decision quickly is often better than the correct decision long overdue.

Finally, **stay alive**. The entrepreneurial journey is a war of attrition – the last man standing reaps the rewards. Building a business is hard. And if it isn't hard, it's not worth doing.



Bigirimana Feston

Founder & CEO of Global Green Project – Rwanda



I've spent years navigating the exciting yet often unpredictable world of social entrepreneurship. Here's a roadmap I wish I had when I first started, packed with lessons learned for young people eager to make a positive impact:

- 1) **Knowledge is Power:** Don't be that entrepreneur rushing in blindfolded. Dedicate time to researching your chosen field. Understand industry trends, potential challenges, and the existing landscape. This knowledge becomes your compass – guiding your decisions and increasing your chances of success.
- 2) **Embrace the Rollercoaster:** Entrepreneurship isn't a walk in the park. There will be setbacks, unexpected obstacles, and moments where you just want to throw in the towel. But here's the secret: resilience is key. Cultivate a strong work ethic, learn from your mistakes, adapt, and never give up. Remember, every hurdle overcome makes you stronger and your venture more adaptable.
- 3) **The Power of Connection:** You are not an island. Building a strong network is essential. Seek out mentors – seasoned individuals who can offer guidance and support. Connect with industry peers, share experiences, and learn from each other. Don't be afraid to reach out – you'd be surprised how many people are willing to help a passionate entrepreneur.
- 4) **Innovation is King:** The world craves solutions, and those who innovate win. Develop a growth mindset, constantly seeking new ways to tackle problems. Don't be afraid to experiment, and focus on solutions that address the most pressing challenges faced by your target audience. Remember, the most impactful solutions often spring from fresh perspectives.
- 5) **Find Your Why:** Yes, building a successful social enterprise is important. However, true fulfilment comes from pursuing something you genuinely care about. When driven by passion, challenges become growth opportunities, and long hours feel more like an exciting adventure. Find your purpose – your "why" – and let that fuel your journey.

Remember, success is a marathon, not a sprint. It requires dedication, a blend of hard work and smart work, and a constant commitment to learning and growing. Believe in yourself, never stop innovating, and get ready to make a real difference in the world!



Leon Škrilec

Founder of Smart Checkin – Slovenia



Building a business is a marathon, not a sprint. Each day, remind yourself that patience and persistence are your best allies. In the beginning, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of quick wins, but success rarely happens overnight. It takes time to build your brand and develop a loyal customer base. **Don't compare your journey to others** – every business has its own timeline. Embrace your unique path and stay focused.

You will face challenges. There will be days when progress feels slow or setbacks seem overwhelming. This is where your persistence will shine. Like a marathon runner pushing through fatigue, remind yourself why you started and keep moving forward. Successful entrepreneurs adapt and turn obstacles into growth opportunities. Adopt a long-term perspective. Each setback is a lesson that will strengthen your resolve and deepen your understanding of the market.

So, as you dive in, trust the process, stay committed to your vision, and remember that the journey is just as important as the destination. **Patience and persistence will guide you,** leading to sustainable success. You've got this!

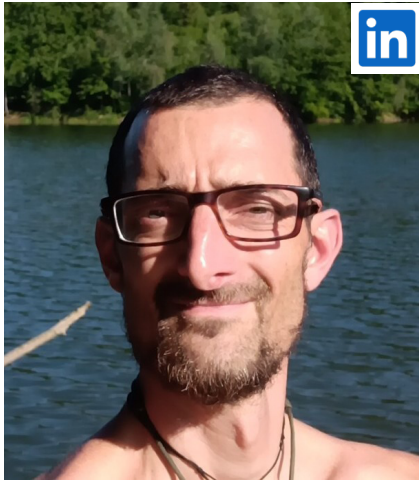


Udaya Bhaskar Kamisetty

Co-Founder & President of Sollys Consulting and Solutions – India



Start small and target big! Begin with manageable goals that lay the groundwork for larger ambitions. Incremental progress builds momentum and confidence, propelling you towards your grand vision. Each small success serves as a stepping stone to greater achievements. **Build a strong team and network!** Surround yourself with individuals who complement your strengths and share your values. Cultivate a diverse network of mentors, collaborators, and supporters. Leverage their expertise and perspectives to navigate challenges and seize opportunities. **Focus on solving real-time problems with values!** Direct your efforts towards addressing tangible issues that resonate with your core values. Let your actions reflect your commitment to making a meaningful impact on society. Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. Cultivate resilience in the face of setbacks, viewing them as temporary obstacles rather than insurmountable barriers. Stay optimistic, harnessing the power of positivity to fuel your perseverance and creativity. Strive for regular wins, no matter how small! Celebrate every milestone, no matter how modest, as a testament to your progress. Embrace a mindset of continuous improvement, setting achievable targets and relishing each accomplishment along the way. By cultivating a culture of success, you'll sustain momentum and motivation on your journey.



Miha Berčič

Founder of BTAR Solutions – Slovenia



I would not change anything. **Time is holographic – everything happens now.** By changing myself at this moment, I change my past and open possibilities for a colourful future to co-create.

Note to my past self: Be humble, converse gently with compassion – everyone is a (un)conscious creator. **We are all one**, brothers and sisters. Business without heart and spirituality is doomed to fail and decay.

Now, a little more serious - My advice to new entrepreneurs: **Follow your heart and passion**, ask for advice from experienced senior people, and take only what aligns strongly with your vision. When creating, take time away from others – stop, look, listen. Be alone, calm, and in good vibes. Be exact and specific – this way you will attract and create with ease.

Start slow, small, test ideas a lot, and launch soon with underdeveloped ideas – PLAY. Invite co-creators, as more people = more energy = sooner manifestation = success.

Money is a tool and a consequence of pure heart desire and a clear thought process. **Money should never be a goal.** This mindset will make you happy.

Fall 30 times, get back up 31 times, and reap what you have planted the previous 30 times.

Sever all bad connections with people not aligned with your ideas and vibration – but leave a door open. People are changing, and so are you – in a couple of months, you can realign with someone who is currently a totally incompatible co-creator and create powerful and beautiful things.



Maksat Rysaliev

Co-Founder & CEO of SentiCam – USA

Senticam



If I could go back to the beginning, I'd start by saying: **be patient, and keep going**. Success doesn't happen overnight – it's built through both wins and setbacks. And remember, failure is a lesson and an experience you can't buy. Wear it like a badge of honor, because it's what shapes you and makes you stronger.

I'd also remind myself to **invest in real relationships**. Whether in business or life, it's the people around you who matter most. It's not about how many people you know – it's about building genuine connections with those who share your values and push you to grow.

Most importantly, **take care of yourself** – spiritually, physically, and mentally. It's easy to get caught up chasing success, but none of it matters if your health or inner peace are neglected. Make time for prayer, exercise, rest, and reflection. And when no one else believes in you, **you must believe in yourself**. Trust your journey, even when others doubt it.

Finally, **trust your team**. You can't do it all alone. Build a team that shares the vision, and let them help carry it forward. And **never forget your purpose**. Money and success are great, but what really counts is the positive impact you have on others.



Salman Mustafa

Co-Founder of Ambeego – Pakistan



If I could offer advice to my past self as I was starting my entrepreneurial journey, knowing what I do now, it would revolve around embracing the creator economy and focusing on skill and audience development through storytelling. In today's world, we're witnessing the rise of billion-dollar companies founded by a single person, where **adaptability and the ability to develop multiple skills are key to success.**

First, I would **emphasize the importance of self-investment.** Focus on yourself – your skills, your mindset, and your personal growth – because this is the foundation for long-term success. The journey to finding the right idea or project is simple in principle: go after what you would use yourself. If you are passionate about something, it becomes much easier to promote, refine, and resonate with others.

Consistency is another crucial lesson. Whether it's pursued alongside a full-time role or a part-time pursuit, **you need to be persistent.** You have to keep pushing forward until you discover that perfect blend of idea and execution that connects with people.

And while financial gain will naturally follow, it's important to recognize that **money alone shouldn't be the end goal.** True success, in my view, is the ability to say "no" – to have the freedom to turn down opportunities or paths that don't align with your values or interests. That freedom is what ultimately defines success in an entrepreneurial journey and leads to a better balance in life.



Muhammad Maarij Zeeshan

Founder & CEO of BeFound Social – USA

BeFound
SOCIAL.

Hire a business mentor or coach early on. If you don't have the capital at the start, go ahead and set clear, documented timelines and goals from day one – especially revenue and product/service development goals. This approach would prevent the constant pivoting I went through in the beginning. Jumping from one idea to another multiple times hindered my growth in the early stages. With those timelines and goals in place, my focus would have been sharper, and I wouldn't have wasted so much time shifting gears. I'd stay laser-focused on that one path, and once I reached full capacity, I'd then look for a coach to take me 10x further.

Having a coach changed everything for me. Just this past year, I brought one on board, and my growth in the past quarter has outpaced the previous 2 to 3 years combined. It's the kind of guidance that courses and DIY learning simply can't offer. Sure, courses will take you from point A to point B, but a good coach will get you from point B to point Z.

In short, prioritize setting those **clear goals and timelines**, and **don't be afraid to invest in a mentor** who can fast-track your success.



Arian Saddam Hossain

Co-Founder & CEO of DdF (Designers do Futuro) – Brazil

 **DESIGNERS
DO
FUTURO**

The mantra "Sell Sell Sell" resonates strongly – **nothing will happen until you can sell** what you offer. Make small successes (sales) first, then leverage that success for a bigger one. Success will certainly never come without bad times. Cultivating a relentless "Never Give Up" mindset is paramount – a trait to be ingrained as a consistent habit. This journey is such that falling down a hundred times means getting up for the 101st time.

Focus on only one thing at a time. **Focus on making your dream business, not money.** Business will make money – not necessarily the other way around! Take care of your people if you want to grow. You had the dream, but they make it happen. Choose people who will go through hell with you.

Finally, follow your gut. Do it.



JC Rodriguez

Founder of Lettcraft – USA



If I could start my journey again, I would advise myself to begin sooner. **The earlier you start, the quicker you can learn** from failures and discover what truly resonates with you. Work fast, break things. Always be part of a community. Never forget why you started in the first place.

I would also emphasize the **importance of seeking input from leaders and experts** rather than trying to do everything alone. As an entrepreneur, it's easy to feel the need to prove yourself by going solo, but I've learned that leveraging others' strengths can significantly accelerate your growth.

One groundbreaking concept I've embraced is the idea of the "Magical Pair." This refers to a trusted partner who complements your skills and challenges your thinking – someone who can finish your sentences and fill in your weak spots. **Working with someone who has a different perspective** can enhance creativity and productivity exponentially.

I was fortunate to find two friends who became my partners in launching a new venture (apart from Lettcraft), and I can say that **collaboration makes the journey** not only easier but also more enjoyable. If you're not having fun, it's probably not worth it.

Live life. Create value. Shoot for the Moon.



Kristijan Popovski

Founder of MSOS (Macedonian Student Organization in Slovenia) – Slovenia



Macedonian Student
Organisation in Slovenia

Creating an organization is like nurturing a child – it comes with moments of joy and excitement, but also uncertainty and challenge. One day, you're full of energy, cheering it on. The next, you might be searching for calm and clarity. This journey is never straightforward, but it's these **ups and downs that shape both you and your organization.**

To succeed as an entrepreneur or manager, **embrace both the good and tough days.** Each has its significance. Surround yourself with the right people – those who support you, challenge you, and help you grow. Build relationships where you give more than you expect to receive, because true success is built on mutual support and collaboration.

Appreciate the moments and the people – that make your journey meaningful. The foundation of any successful organization starts with personal growth. It's important to nurture both your own development and the organization's progress. Even in challenging times, remember that your hard work will pay off, and at the very least, you'll gain valuable lessons that will serve you in the future.

Most importantly, **stay positive and grounded.** Success requires balance – don't let stress take over, and make time to enjoy the simple things, like nature, that keep you energized and focused on the bigger picture.



Shashank Narayanan

Founder of Compound – UAE

compound

You only fail if you give up. Any entrepreneur will tell you that building a company from the ground up is a unique experience, irrespective of how large or small their business is. It will test you, push you, and give you the highest highs and lowest lows – but all of this is part of building a company.

Success is defined by your own metrics. You don't have a boss setting targets or patting your back when you've done a good job. All of it must come from within you. Failure, too, is defined by your own metrics. You will have days – and sometimes even months – when things aren't going your way. But you only fail if you give up. So don't. Keep going. **The future is bright, and your ideas deserve a chance at success** – however you choose to define it.



Rok Bojanc

Founder of Bojanc Cyber – Slovenia

**BOJANC
CYBER**

When I first started, I believed that having a solid business plan and a clear vision were the most important factors for success. While these elements are indeed critical, I quickly learned that the **ability to persist through challenges and adapt to changing circumstances** is what truly makes or breaks a business.

At the same time, persistence has been essential. There have been moments of doubt when setbacks made it tempting to consider giving up or changing direction completely. But I've learned that success often comes to those who simply refuse to quit. **Staying committed to your vision**, even when the going gets tough, is what allows you to push through barriers and ultimately reach your goals.

Setbacks are not failures but opportunities to learn and grow. I would focus on building a resilient mindset that balances determination with flexibility, allowing the business to not just survive but thrive in the face of uncertainty.

To anyone starting out, I'd say: **be ready to adapt, and never underestimate the power of persistence.** These traits will serve you well as you navigate the ups and downs of entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Final statements & closing notes

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Final statements & closing notes

Through the Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative, we wish to support and inspire entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey. To make this vision a reality, we've connected with over 100 owners, founders, CEOs, and best-in-class leaders from all around the world. We asked them what advice they would give themselves if they were starting their entrepreneurial journey again, but with all the knowledge and experience they have today.

Their answers were shaped by real previous successes, failures, and most importantly, experiences they have gathered on their way towards optimum success. Our hope is that these pages not only guide you through the ups and downs of your journey but also remind you that you're never alone in your pursuit of building something meaningful.

THANK YOU NOTE:

A huge thank you to each and every one of the 149 incredible participants who contributed to this year's initiative. This wouldn't be possible without your unique insights, and I am truly humbled by the wisdom you've so generously shared. Each of you has brought something invaluable to this initiative and the broader entrepreneurial community we are building together.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support, dedication, and passion have made this all possible. You've reminded us of the power of collaboration and the immense greatness we can create when we come together. I am deeply grateful for your contributions and excited for the amazing things we will continue to achieve together.



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