



Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative

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

Includes:

- A structured, in-depth article: 'Building Entrepreneurial Systems That Last'
- A section featuring advice from 150+ Global Experts

Welcome to the 4th Edition

Each year, the [Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative \(IEJI\)](#) brings together founders, CEOs, and experts from around the world who share one goal of making the entrepreneurial experience clearer and easier to navigate.

What began in 2022 as a small idea has grown into a global community rooted in shared experience and encouragement. Each year, **more than 100 participants** contribute practical advice, grounded in the belief that every entrepreneurial journey is unique and that success looks different for everyone.

This 4th edition marks another step in that journey. Our community keeps expanding, connecting people from many backgrounds and parts of the world. Each new story adds perspective and supports a space where entrepreneurs learn from one another with honesty and purpose. IEJI reminds us that **entrepreneurship is not a solo pursuit but a shared journey** shaped by connection.

The response to this initiative has been remarkable. It motivates us to keep improving, provide a better experience for participants, and reach more people who can benefit from the shared insights.

Thank you to everyone who contributes, reads, and shares these pages. Your support makes this initiative possible and reminds us that progress happens when knowledge is shared.

About IEJI

The IEJI is a global initiative created by Sara Kremsar, founder of Optimod, to collect and share real experiences from people who have lived the entrepreneurial journey. Its purpose is to make entrepreneurship more practical and easier to understand by turning real stories into knowledge that others can apply and learn from.

Sara created IEJI after seeing how many entrepreneurs struggle to find clear, experience-based guidance as they build their businesses. She wanted to create a space where real stories and practical lessons could help others move forward with more confidence.

Today, IEJI goes beyond the annual brochures. The insights gathered each year contribute to a growing knowledge base that supports collaborative projects and the creation of educational resources, helping more people learn directly from real entrepreneurial experience.

Each year, IEJI continues to grow while staying true to its mission: **bridging the gap between theory and practice in entrepreneurship** and showing that the entrepreneurial journey is a shared experience built on learning, connection, and action.



Sara Kremsar
Founder of OPTIMOD
Initiative Creator & Author

The Purpose Behind IEJI

Starting and running a business is never simple. There is no single rulebook or clear path that guarantees success. Every entrepreneur faces unique challenges shaped by their own circumstances, industries, and experiences. While there is no shortage of information available, much of it is scattered, theoretical, or disconnected from real life. **Reading about entrepreneurship is one thing. Living it is another.**

Entrepreneurship is often explained through frameworks and strategies, yet few resources capture the unpredictability, pressure, and constant change that entrepreneurs face every day. Many people begin their journey feeling prepared on paper but soon realize that true progress comes from doing the work, making mistakes, and learning through experience.

That is where the [Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative \(IEJI\)](#) comes in. It was created to bridge the gap between theory and practice by bringing together real stories, lived experiences, and lessons from people who have already walked the entrepreneurial path.

Instead of offering one-size-fits-all advice, IEJI focuses on practical insights that entrepreneurs can relate to, adapt, and apply in their own journeys.

IEJI exists because every journey is different, but no one should have to walk it alone. Its goal is to make the entrepreneurial experience clearer, more connected, and more human. This belief shapes how the initiative works each year, combining structured knowledge with real stories and keeping every edition authentic, relatable, and useful in real-world entrepreneurship.

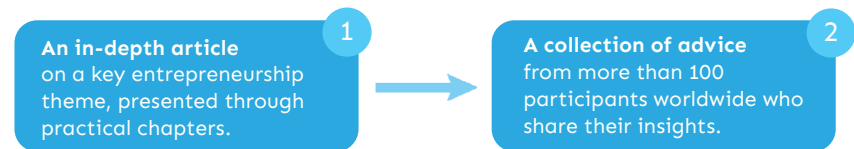
Creation of Each IEJI Edition

Each year, the IEJI follows a structured process that leads to the creation of its annual brochure. Through this process, insights are gathered directly from people who have experienced entrepreneurship in practice. We believe the best knowledge comes from real experience, so we go straight to the source, to those who have already walked the path.

Every participant is invited to reflect on their own journey and **answer one 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?”

The collected insights are then shaped into the annual brochure, which follows a dual approach by combining two main parts:



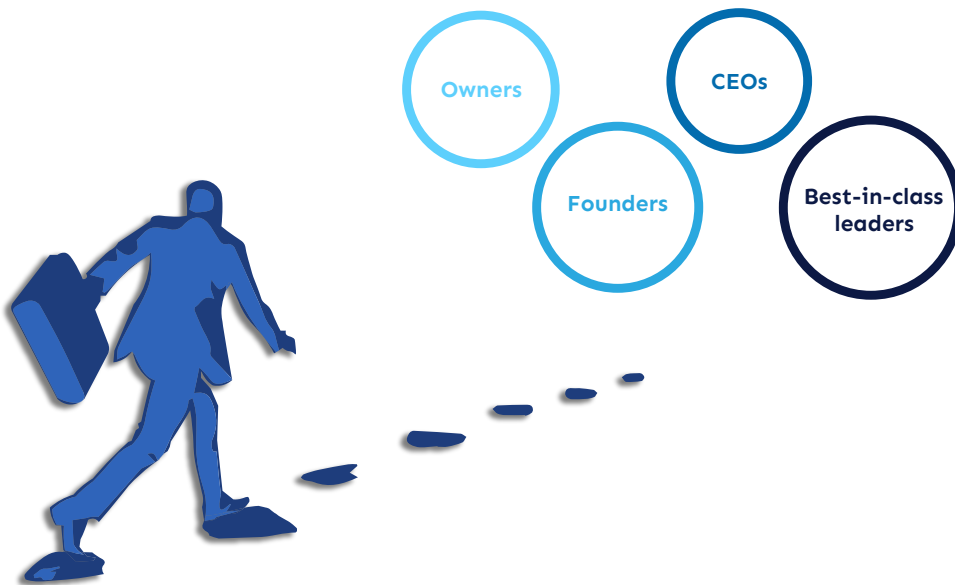
Together, these two parts form the foundation of every IEJI brochure. This structure keeps each edition focused and practical. The article introduces and explores the theme of the year, while the advice and stories bring those ideas to life through real experience.

This mix of research, storytelling, and reflection makes each edition both useful and relatable. Each year, we refine the process with new voices and updated topics to keep the content relevant, engaging, and easy to follow.

IEJI Participants

The **Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative (IEJI)** brings together a diverse group of people united by their real entrepreneurial experience. Most participants are founders, which reflects the entrepreneurial nature of the initiative. However, the IEJI also includes owners, CEOs, best-in-class leaders, and next-generation professionals who approach their work with an entrepreneurial mindset, regardless of their formal title.

Participants come from all stages of the entrepreneurial journey and represent a wide **mixture of industries, roles, and backgrounds**. Some are just beginning their path, while others have decades of experience leading teams or building global companies. This variety of perspectives creates a rich and dynamic collection of insights shaped by different stages of growth, challenges, and achievements.



Results & Impact of IEJI

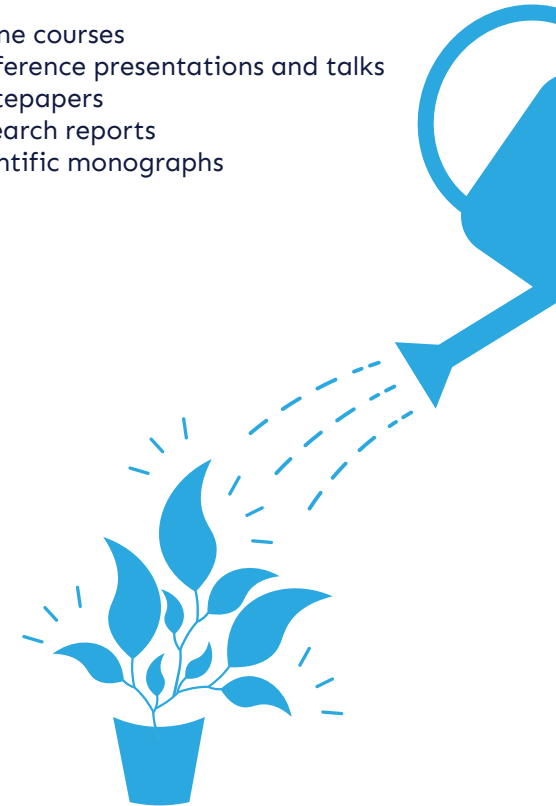
Since its creation, the IEJI has grown from a small project into an international network of entrepreneurs and leaders. The insights gathered each year form the foundation for new educational materials developed in collaboration with universities, startup incubators, accelerators, and other educational institutions, as well as individual contributors who use this content to strengthen entrepreneurship education and practical learning.

Resources Created from Annual IEJI Insights:

- Startup guides
- Practical toolkits
- Leadership blueprints
- Entrepreneurship frameworks
- Case studies and success stories
- Online courses
- Conference presentations and talks
- Whitepapers
- Research reports
- Scientific monographs

IEJI Achievements to Date:

- 4 editions completed (2022–2025)
- 4 brochures published
- 641 participants involved
- 70 countries represented
- 12 themes explored (3 per edition)
- 36 topics covered (3 per theme)



Founders' Off-The-Grid Retreat

After gathering insights from hundreds of individuals over several years, it became clear that many were seeking a more personal way to connect. In 2025, the IEJI inspired the first **Founders' Off-the-Grid Retreat**, an in-person gathering in Slovenia that brought together IEJI participants who had shared their insights in the annual brochures.

For decades, universities and business schools have focused mainly on theory and hard skills. All of that is valuable, but entrepreneurship is not learned only in classrooms. It must be lived, because it is shaped by experience, reflection, and community.

The retreat became a living laboratory for this idea, where entrepreneurs were both teachers and students.

The Founders' Off-the-Grid Retreat shows what becomes possible when we rethink how we support entrepreneurs. By linking academia with real-world practice, it delivers a more rigorous, practical, and human approach to entrepreneurship education.

It has become a model for how entrepreneurs can learn, grow, and contribute to a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem. Creating more spaces like this supports individual entrepreneurs and builds a community that values impact, resilience, and collaboration.

This vision of learning through real experience, reflection, and genuine connection continues to guide IEJI and the broader work of OPTIMOD, proving that meaningful growth happens when entrepreneurs learn together.

[WATCH 2025 RETREAT AFTERMOVIE](#)



1.0 Theme Introduction

Overview of the Brochure's Theme and Topics

7

2.0 Article Overview

Article on the theme of '**Building Entrepreneurial Systems That Last**' divided into 3 chapters

9

2.1 Ecosystems & New Learning Models

10

2.1.1 Entrepreneurial Communities and Peer Learning

11

2.1.2 Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Emerging Founders

12

2.1.3 Purpose-Led Collaborative Alliances

13

2.2 Trust, Sustainability & Compliance

14

2.2.1 Trust-First Business and Authentic Relationships

15

2.2.2 Circular and Sustainable Business Practices

16

2.2.3 Understanding Compliance in Business

17

2.3 AI-Powered Entrepreneurship

18

2.3.1 AI-Native Business Building

19

2.3.2 AI-Driven Flexible Teams

20

2.3.3 Emerging and Human-Centered AI

21

Article Summary

22

Quick Summary of Previous Chapters & the Author's Insights

3.0 Advice from Global Experts

Over 150 participant sections, each filled with advice and insights

23

Conclusion

Final Statements & Closing Notes

211

Theme Introduction

Overview of the Brochure's Theme and Topics

1.0

Theme Introduction

1.0

Overview of the Brochure's Theme and Topics

It has been four years since we created the [Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative \(IEJI\)](#). When we look back, each brochure mirrors the same path entrepreneurs follow in real life. There is a beginning, a rise, a shift, and eventually the question of how to build something that lasts.

In 2022, Brochure Vol. 1 began with '**Embarking on the Entrepreneurial Journey**', focusing on the early steps and the courage needed to begin. In 2023, Brochure Vol. 2 explored '**Elevating Entrepreneurial Potential**', highlighting growth, momentum, and finding your direction. In 2024, Brochure Vol. 3 looked ahead with '**Empowering the Future of Entrepreneurship**', reflecting on purpose, learning, and resilience. Now we reach the next stage, and in this fourth edition, we explore what keeps a business alive over time. Brochure Vol. 4 is shaped around the theme '**Building Entrepreneurial Systems That Last**'.

Some business systems shine brightly for a moment and disappear just as fast. Others remain steady, adapt quietly, and stay relevant even as the world around them changes. The difference between the two is rarely a matter of luck. Ideas evolve, markets shift, new technologies enter the scene, and regulations become stricter. In a world that moves this quickly, the entrepreneurs who stay strong the longest are the ones who continue learning and surround themselves with supportive relationships that help them grow. What lasts is not a single idea. What lasts is the system that surrounds the entrepreneur.

Because learning sits at the heart of every lasting system, this year's brochure also explores how founders learn from one another. Reading about swimming is very different from actually going into the water. Learning about entrepreneurship follows the same pattern. No amount of reading can truly prepare you for what to expect.

This is why we **gathered insights from more than 150 global experts**. You will find them in Section 3.0' [Advice from Global Experts](#)'. These contributions offer grounded and practical lessons that are here to support you as you navigate through your own entrepreneurial journey.



Article Overview

2.0

Article on the theme of 'Building Entrepreneurial Systems That Last', divided into 3 chapters

Ecosystems & New Learning Models

2.1

First Chapter



Entrepreneurship no longer happens alone. Founders who grow the fastest are those who learn together, share what works, and stay connected with people facing similar challenges. Knowledge now moves through communities, networks, and peer learning circles much faster than through traditional education. This shift is the reason learning today feels more social, more practical, and more continuous than ever before.

This chapter explores how community-based learning helps entrepreneurs stay relevant, supported, and visible. It shows why learning from real cases is often quicker and more meaningful than learning from theory. It explains how younger, diverse, and often overlooked founders strengthen the entire ecosystem when they are included. It also looks at how collaboration built on shared goals opens access to markets, talent, and resources that would otherwise remain out of reach. The aim is to show how to create a learning ecosystem around entrepreneurship where people, experience, and support remain connected over time.

Entrepreneurial Communities and Peer Learning

2.1.1

First Chapter – Subchapter 1/3

It is no secret that we learn fastest from our own mistakes, yet it is wiser to learn from mistakes someone else has already paid for. Entrepreneurship works the same way. It is often more helpful to hear how someone handled a real situation than to read ten pages of theory. **The space between theory and practice is where peer learning truly lives.**

Entrepreneurial communities make that space real. They are small, trusted circles where people can talk about things they would never post online (a sales call that failed, a partner who walked away, a client who suddenly asked for extra documents, or a launch that did not perform as expected). Not because they want to hide it. But because in public they often hear only “you got this”, which is kind but not always helpful. In a good community they receive something more useful, “I had the same issue, here is what I tried, here is what worked.”

Many entrepreneurs think they are the only ones facing a specific problem. Most of the time, they are not.

The challenge is rarely new, even if it feels new to you. Someone has already solved it, tested it, and improved it. The difference is whether you are close enough to hear their story. That is why it helps to join rooms, groups, programs, events, and online spaces where people openly share what works right now. The format does not matter. It can be a WhatsApp group, a breakfast in a coworking space, an accelerator, a monthly online call, or a simple LinkedIn chat that slowly turned into a support group. What matters is the steady flow of real experience.

Peer learning is powerful because it brings insights from situations happening in the present moment. It follows today's market, today's tools, and today's rules. It also makes the journey less lonely. Staying in regular contact with others on the same path means faster feedback, fewer repeated mistakes, and more confidence to act.

Communities grow even stronger when they stay open to people with different backgrounds and levels of experience. Newer members bring fresh perspectives and the newest tools. More experienced members bring structure and pattern recognition. Together, they create a learning ecosystem where knowledge moves in every direction and everyone has the chance to grow.



Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Emerging Founders

2.1.2

First Chapter – Subchapter 2/3

It is easy to think entrepreneurship belongs only to people who already have networks, money, or the “right” background. In reality, **ideas and ambition appear in many places that are often overlooked**, for example, in classrooms where students solve problems in new ways, in small towns where people notice gaps no one else sees, in families that never ran a business but understand hard work, and in creative teams that turn everyday frustrations into ideas. If these people cannot enter the ecosystem, their ideas remain unseen and the entire community misses out.

Inclusive entrepreneurship closes the space between those with access and those with ideas.

It also gives emerging founders a path forward long before they have a proven track record. This means creating a culture where youth, women, graduates, student teams, career-switchers, and people returning to work feel welcome early in the journey. These groups often bring a fresh advantage, they understand new tools instinctively, they notice behaviour shifts faster, and they test ideas with less cost and less hesitation. Their perspective is not just helpful or a nice-to-have, it carries the future of entrepreneurship.

For more experienced entrepreneurs, this should not feel like a threat. Feeling unsure when new voices enter the space is normal. But when different generations and backgrounds work together, everyone benefits. Experience brings pattern recognition, structure, and better decisions. Newcomers bring speed, digital-first thinking, and access to markets older founders may not notice. Together, they can see opportunities neither group would catch on their own.

This is why healthy ecosystems offer easy places to enter, like open meetups, online circles, demo days, student founder clubs, local hubs, and simple office hours. These kinds of spaces let someone show up with nothing more than an idea and still feel they belong. Once inside, they can find mentors who guide them, partners who believe in their direction, and peers who grow alongside them. When these doors stay closed, the ecosystem shrinks and becomes predictable.

When inclusion becomes a natural part of the culture, two things happen. First, more people look at entrepreneurship and think “this is for me,” which creates a strong pipeline of next-generation founders. Second, collaboration becomes easier because people grow used to working across age, background, and experience level from the very beginning. **This is how an ecosystem stays alive for this generation and the next one that follows.**



Purpose-Led Collaborative Alliances

2.1.3

First Chapter – Subchapter 3/3

Not everything in entrepreneurship has to be built alone. Many things move faster when people who care about the same outcome decide to work on it together. You have probably seen this already, even if you did not label it as collaboration. A local founder teams up with a school so students can learn from real experience. Two startups promote each other rather than competing for the same small audience. A company and an NGO run one event, share the workload, and both strengthen their impact.

Some goals are simply too big, too slow, or too costly to reach by yourself. This is where purpose-led collaboration becomes powerful. At its core, it is not complicated. It is people and organisations choosing to work together because they believe in the same purpose. Each partner brings something the others do not have yet. It might be trust within a community, practical skills, communication channels, volunteers, or simply the time and energy to move things forward.

You do not need to build everything from zero. You use what already exists and you share the effort.

The most important part is clarity of purpose. Without it, people lose interest or pull in different directions. When the purpose is specific and shared, everyone understands why they are involved, what they are contributing, and what success looks like. A clear purpose also makes it easier to invite new partners, because they can immediately see where they fit and how their strengths add value.

A simple way to shape a shared purpose is to reflect on four guiding questions at the start:

- What change do we want to create?
- Who exactly should benefit?
- What does each partner bring?
- How will we show that it worked?

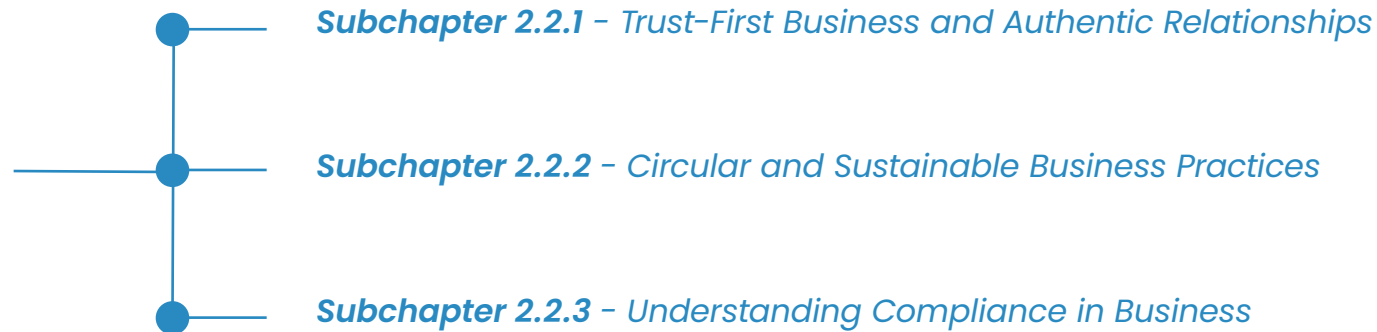
When collaboration grows from a shared purpose, the benefits extend far beyond a single project. It opens doors for people who are still entering entrepreneurship. It helps reach groups that are usually left out, and it keeps the ecosystem connected, active, and growing. In the end, purpose-led alliances remind us that each of us can build something on our own, but we can build more, build faster, and include more people when we choose to do the right things together.



Trust, Sustainability & Compliance

2.2

Second Chapter



Every lasting business is shaped by trust, responsibility, and transparency. These values help founders create stability, form genuine partnerships, and navigate changing conditions with confidence. When trust supports relationships, when sustainability guides decisions, and when clear systems make daily work easier, a business gains the steady foundation it needs to grow with purpose and integrity.

This chapter explores how trust, sustainability, and compliance strengthen entrepreneurship. It shows why trust builds credibility and meaningful connections. It explains how thoughtful, sustainable actions create long-term value for people, communities, and the environment. It also looks at how simple and transparent compliance practices bring clarity, peace of mind, and the confidence to operate without unnecessary risk. The aim is to show how these three elements work together to create businesses that remain responsible, relevant, and resilient for years to come.

Trust-First Business and Authentic Relationships

2.2.1

Second Chapter – Subchapter 1/3

Most entrepreneurs will tell you the same thing. **People work with people they trust.** That includes customers who want to feel safe, partners who want to share responsibility, suppliers who rely on stability, mentors who invest their time, and even future team members choosing where to build their careers. The market today is crowded and noisy. Getting seen is only step one.

The real question people ask is, “Can I rely on you”?

A trust-first business makes that answer easy to find. You are clear about what you do and what you do not do. You reply when people reach out. You show your work instead of only talking about it. You keep the promises you make, even the small ones that nobody else notices. You tell the truth when something does not go as planned. It sounds simple, but a lot of people do not do it. That is why the ones who do it stand out. And this is exactly what others remember.

Authentic relationships go even further. They grow from listening, understanding, and paying attention to what the other person actually needs, whether that is a client, a supplier, a partner, or another founder. When people feel seen and not only sold to, they stay longer, they recommend you to others, and they forgive small mistakes. That is why building relationships for the sake of connection, learning, and support should come first. Selling can come after.

This matters now because **trust is harder to earn than ever.** Buyers ask more questions. Partners ask for more documents. Larger organisations want proof of compliance, sustainability, and data protection. Customers want real stories and real people, not copy-paste marketing. Talent wants to know who they will work for and what the company truly stands for. And because AI can make everything look polished from the outside, people look for signs that you are real on the inside.

Nobody likes to be sold to or pushed, and nobody wants to work with someone who is pretending. This is why trust should be part of your values, not just a tactic. Building a trust-first business comes from small and consistent habits, being reachable, sharing proof, showing the people behind the company, being clear on values and terms, giving credit, and working with partners so everyone benefits. When you do that, selling becomes easier, partnerships become stronger, you attract better people, and you get invited into more rooms. **Trust removes friction across the whole business, not just in sales.**



Circular and Sustainable Business Practices

2.2.2

Second Chapter – Subchapter 2/3

Sustainability is now part of everyday business decisions. Customers want to know how products are made. Larger clients ask about suppliers and materials. Public tenders award points for environmental care. Banks, investors, and employees all look at how a company manages its impact. For founders, the question is no longer whether to act, but how to make sustainability practical and realistic in daily work without turning it into another layer of paperwork.

Circular and sustainable business practices begin with awareness. Once you look closely at how materials, energy, and waste move through your company, opportunities for improvement become visible. You start noticing unused resources, unnecessary steps, and moments where a small change makes a big difference. You begin seeing where you can save, repair, reuse, or collaborate with others.

The changes do not need to be big. They can be as simple as sharing transport with a nearby business, repairing equipment instead of replacing it, or selling leftover materials to someone who can use them. These actions may seem small, but they add up quickly. Circular thinking grows naturally from everyday decisions like these. For most companies, it does not require a complete transformation, only a steady series of better choices that strengthen the business over time.



Sustainability is not a final goal but a continuous process of improvement.

Many smaller businesses feel overwhelmed by sustainability rules and reporting requirements that seem designed for large corporations. That frustration is understandable. The best approach is to focus on **what can be shown clearly and honestly**. Explain where your materials come from, how you treat your people, and how you handle waste. Describe how your company supports the local community and contributes to the environment it depends on. Simple documentation builds trust with clients, partners, and investors, and it helps your team stay aligned with shared values.

When sustainability becomes part of everyday decisions, it gradually shapes how progress unfolds far beyond one business or generation. Each thoughtful action creates a ripple effect that improves how resources are used, how people work together, and how communities grow. Over time, these choices build systems that are stable, adaptable, and fair. They allow future generations to inherit functioning economies, healthy environments, and the chance to create new ideas of their own. **By acting responsibly today, we make it possible for those who come after us to thrive without needing to repair what was lost.**

Understanding Compliance in Business

2.2.3

Second Chapter – Subchapter 3/3

Many people feel uneasy when they hear the word compliance. It sounds complicated or strict, but in reality it is something every entrepreneur faces from the very beginning. Starting a business already means dealing with forms and responsibilities. As your company grows, these requirements evolve too. Every business operates within a framework made up of guidelines, rules, regulations, and laws. These terms often sound similar, but each plays a different role.

GUIDELINES

are flexible directions or best practices. They are not mandatory, but they help you make better decisions and act responsibly in different situations. For example, a company might follow a guideline to respond to clients within one working day.

RULES

are internal standards that you and your team set to guide everyday work. They define how tasks are done, how communication happens, and how consistency is maintained. Clear rules keep the team aligned and make daily operations smoother.

REGULATIONS

are detailed instructions that explain how specific laws should be applied. They are created by authorities to ensure that everyone follows the law in the same way. For instance, a tax regulation explains exactly how and when income should be reported.

LAWS

are official requirements created by governments. They define what is legally allowed or forbidden and apply to everyone. Ignoring them can result in fines, penalties, or even business closure.

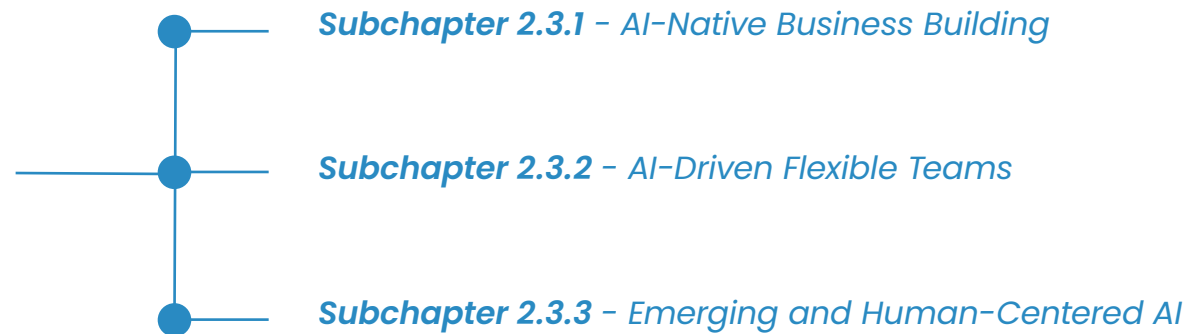
COMPLIANCE connects all these elements and puts them into action. It is the process of ensuring that guidelines, rules, regulations, and laws are understood and followed in daily work. Compliance turns formal requirements into practical habits that keep a business organised, responsible, and transparent. It bridges the gap between what must be done and how it is actually done.

When you start treating compliance as support rather than pressure, everything changes. It helps you stay calm, organised, and confident in the decisions you make each day. You no longer worry about what might go wrong because you know your work stands on solid ground. The time you once spent fixing small problems can now go into new ideas, stronger relationships, and the parts of your business that truly inspire you. Compliance becomes less of a task and more of a safety net that lets you grow with clarity, purpose, and peace of mind.

AI-Powered Entrepreneurship

Third Chapter

2.3



Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from being a tool of the future to becoming a foundation of how modern businesses are built and run. For many entrepreneurs, AI represents more than technology. It introduces a new way of solving problems, developing products, and scaling ideas. Those who learn to integrate AI early, adjust to its pace, and balance it with thoughtful human judgment will navigate change with clarity and confidence and help shape the next generation of innovation.

This chapter explores how AI is reshaping entrepreneurship from the inside out. It shows how AI-native businesses place technology at the heart of their operations so creativity and delivery can happen faster. It explains how AI-driven teams combine human strengths with smart systems to stay flexible and focused. It also looks at emerging and human-centered AI, where responsibility and empathy guide how new tools are used so progress supports people rather than replacing them. The aim is to show how the next generation of entrepreneurship will depend on our ability to use intelligent systems wisely, collaborate with them rather than compete with them, and build solutions that remain meaningful in a fast-changing world.

AI-Native Business Building

2.3.1

Third Chapter – Subchapter 1/3

AI is becoming part of almost everything we do. It shapes how we search for information, make purchases, learn new skills, and connect with others. It is also changing how businesses are built and managed. New companies begin with AI at their core, while established ones are rethinking how they operate, make decisions, and create value. This shift influences every industry, every team, and every stage of entrepreneurship.

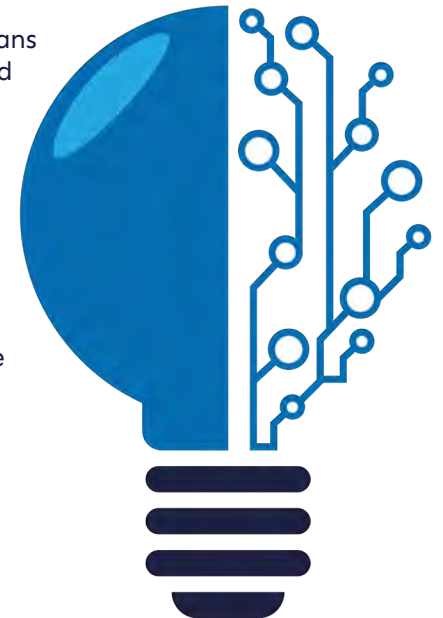
AI-native businesses grow with artificial intelligence built in from the start. For many founders, AI becomes part of how they think, plan, and create. It helps them test ideas before investing heavily, understand what customers truly need, and refine products through small and steady improvements. As the business expands, the system itself begins to learn too. It recognises patterns, adapts to new conditions, and finds more efficient ways to move forward. Over time, the company evolves with its founders, learning and improving alongside them every day.

Building an AI-native business begins with knowing where technology can genuinely help.

For some teams, it means saving time by automating repetitive tasks so people can focus on higher value work. For others, it means making smarter decisions based on real data instead of intuition alone, or creating personalised experiences that feel natural and intuitive for each customer. The aim is to build solutions that are faster, more efficient, and more meaningful for the people who use them.

This way of building also changes how teams think and work together. Founders begin paying closer attention to data, designing processes that can adapt quickly when conditions shift, and creating simple ways to learn from every outcome. It demands curiosity, patience, and a willingness to experiment without expecting immediate perfection.

The most successful AI-native businesses never forget that people come first. They use technology to spark creativity, simplify work, and support better decisions. Smart tools can bring speed and insight, but it is people who give direction, purpose, and heart to what they create. When human understanding and technology grow side by side, businesses become more adaptable, more thoughtful, and better prepared for the future.



AI-Driven Flexible Teams

2.3.2

Third Chapter – Subchapter 2/3

Imagine working in a small team that feels much larger, where people and intelligent tools collaborate to bring ideas to life. This is what AI-driven flexible teams make possible. AI does not replace people, but it becomes part of how work is organised and completed. It supports everyday tasks so that you can focus on strategy, creativity, and meaningful relationships. With the right tools, even a small group can accomplish work that once required far more time, effort, and people.

Some still feel uncertain about using AI at work. They worry about losing control, reducing jobs, or relying too much on technology. These concerns are real, but they show only one part of the picture. **When used thoughtfully, AI often removes pressure rather than creating it.** It takes over repetitive tasks, helps teams make more informed decisions, and brings clarity to work that would otherwise be slow or complex.

The key is not to fear the technology but to guide it with human purpose and responsibility.

In this kind of team, AI supports the process while humans remain in control. Smart tools help with research, planning, writing, analysis, and testing. They gather information, track tasks, and highlight what needs attention, giving people the insight they need to move forward confidently. Over time, roles evolve naturally. People start asking better questions, shaping smarter workflows, and treating data as a supportive partner in daily work. This creates a workplace that feels clear, focused, and productive.



AI-driven flexibility also changes how teams grow and collaborate. Work continues smoothly across different locations and time zones without losing connection. Shared tools keep communication open and projects aligned, even when people contribute at different times. New members learn faster because AI offers guidance, examples, and structure, while experienced members expand their skills through ongoing practice and feedback. **Everyone grows together, supported by a mix of technology, transparency, and trust.**

The strongest AI-driven teams stay grounded in openness and communication. They explain how tools are used, how decisions are made, and where human judgment matters most. When people see AI as support rather than competition, collaboration becomes easier. Tasks move forward with clarity, confidence grows, and innovation becomes part of everyday work. **AI-driven flexible teams focus on working better together, not simply doing more.**

Emerging and Human-Centered AI

2.3.3

Third Chapter – Subchapter 3/3

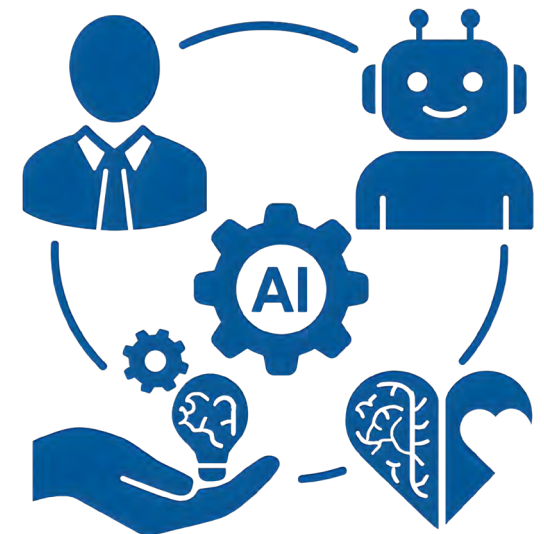
Artificial intelligence is becoming part of nearly everything we do. It helps us learn, work, explore ideas, and stay connected, but it also raises an important question. **How do we make sure progress stays human as technology grows stronger each year?** Human-centered AI begins with that question. It focuses on building systems that support people instead of replacing them. Behind every tool and every model there is still a person deciding how it works, who it benefits, and what values guide its decisions.

Progress only matters when it improves life, strengthens relationships, and makes work more meaningful without losing the human touch.

For entrepreneurs, the rise of AI offers a chance to rethink how businesses connect with people. The aim is to build technology that users can trust and understand. When you communicate openly about how your systems work, what data they rely on, and how decisions are made, people feel safe engaging with what you create. They see honesty, care, and intention behind the technology, and that creates long-lasting relationships.

Human-centered AI grows from the same mindset that drives thoughtful entrepreneurship. It relies on empathy to understand real needs, curiosity to explore better solutions, and responsibility to consider how choices affect others. It is not a single milestone but an ongoing practice of paying attention, asking the right questions, and choosing the path that respects the people you serve. Founders who build with this mindset earn trust that lasts beyond trends and technologies.

The future of AI in business will belong to those who keep humans at the center. **Technology can process information, but only people can give it direction, purpose, and meaning.** When innovation grows with care, curiosity, and intention, progress becomes something that benefits everyone and leaves room for the next generation to build something even better.



Article Summary

Quick Summary of Previous Chapters & the Author's Insights

Entrepreneurship is a living system of ideas, people, and purpose that must adapt to survive in a changing world. It calls for clarity, collaboration, and a deep commitment to creating value that lasts and stands the test of time. This year's focus, **'Building Entrepreneurial Systems That Last'**, explored what helps businesses stay strong, relevant, adaptable, and connected through change over time.

We began with Ecosystems and New Learning Models, highlighting how communities, peer learning, and inclusive collaboration help entrepreneurs grow together and stay relevant. We then turned to Trust, Sustainability, and Compliance, showing how integrity, responsibility, and transparency form the foundation of lasting success. Finally, we explored AI-Powered Entrepreneurship, where intelligent tools and human creativity combine to shape flexible, future-ready systems that evolve with purpose.

As this fourth edition concludes, take a moment to recognise how far you have come. Every insight, connection, and improvement adds to the system you are building. The future belongs to those who keep learning, collaborating, and creating with purpose, because what lasts is not a single idea but the ecosystem that supports it.

Author's Insights:

As you've likely discovered, building something that truly lasts is one of the greatest tests of entrepreneurship. It takes courage, patience, and a willingness to keep learning even when things do not go as planned. Over the past four years of the Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative, I have had the privilege of witnessing founders who grew not just faster but wiser, those who build systems grounded in trust, learning, and shared purpose.

In a world that never stops changing, what keeps us going is the support we find in each other. Every challenge brings a lesson, and every step forward strengthens the foundation you are creating. Keep learning, keep growing, and keep showing up with intention. What you are building is more than a business, it is a reflection of your values, your resilience, and your belief in what is possible. And that is what truly lasts.

Advice from Global Experts

Over 150 participant sections, each filled with advice and insights

3.0

Advice from Global Experts

Over 150 participant sections, each filled with advice and insights

In the following pages, you will find advice and insights from over 150 global experts. This year, we had the honour of welcoming **186 inspiring individuals** to our Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative, once again exceeding our goal of 100 yearly participants. Each year, our community grows stronger, bringing together change and impact-driven individuals from around the world who share their lessons and experiences with openness and purpose.

We are truly grateful for the continued trust, interest, and support from all participants and readers who make this initiative possible year after year. Each story shared and every insight contributed adds to a growing movement of entrepreneurs who learn from one another and build with purpose.

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



Martha Boeckenfeld

Founder & CEO of marthaverse – Switzerland



Here's the advice that's moved the needle most for me: **Pick rooms where you are learning fast and actually enjoy the people.** Titles impress for a week; skills and relationships compound for years. Every quarter I write a one-page plan: what I value, three bets I am making, and three hard "no's." If an opportunity does not serve those bets, I pass, no drama, just a clear "not now."

Health is the lead domino. I protect sleep like a meeting with my board. Pilates keeps my back honest. Plant-based, simple meals keep my brain clear. I give my mornings to sunlight, a page of notes, and one focused block of work. When life gets hectic, I shrink the goal but keep the habit. Ten minutes still counts.

Money: keep it boring and kind. Hold a year of cash so you can think. Automate low-cost investing and stop checking it daily. Keep a small "curiosity" pot for experiments. Buy tools, not trophies. When negotiating, ask for upside and learning, not just salary.

True relationships make the difference. Say thank you early and often. Be kind. Set expectations before they turn into resentments. When there is friction, I assume good intent and ask, "What need is being missed here?" Repair fast; it saves months.

Build quiet leverage in public. Write, teach, ship imperfectly. A steady newsletter or podcast will open doors you did not know existed. Do not chase virality; chase clarity and consistency.

Finally, live in seasons. **Sprint, then recover.** Take tech-free hours. Walk outside; I am often reminded by a small, insistent dog. Define "enough," and measure success by the quality of your mornings and the warmth of your evenings. That balance, not constant hustle, is what keeps me effective and at peace.



Roman Frolov

Founder & CEO of Eternal – UAE



Build something people want. Oftentimes we, as founders, come up with a brilliant idea of how the world should be without asking anybody whether they'd actually want to live in that world. This frequently results in a lot of effort wasted pursuing a "cool idea" rather than building something truly valuable. Mimicking others isn't an option either, as thinking by analogy is a path to mediocrity. Innovation rarely happens to copycats. Think differently, start from first principles.

It's okay if your first idea, product, demo, or investment fails. In fact, **get ready to fail a lot.** Moving fast requires short feedback loops, and experimentation is a crucial part of it. You can also think of those early failures as "cheap" lessons, since catching mistakes early saves time and resources later on.

Once you've identified a problem that brings significant value to a small group of people, or even a little value to millions, focus intensively. Many opportunities will come and go while you're building your company, so **learn to say no.**

And then, be persistent. Both in execution and in learning. Be proud of your accomplishments, but remember **you're never too great to stop learning.**

Lastly, **don't forget to take care of your health and spend time with people dear to you.** Being a founder is hard, and some of us tend to close up during moments when the opposite would be most beneficial.



Michele Wee

Founder & CEO of Who Says I Can't – Singapore

Who says I can't?

If I could give my younger self one piece of advice, it would be this: **Trust yourself more and act before you feel ready.** After 30 years in finance, I took the leap and launched “Who Says I Can’t.” The name reminds me to stay courageous, keep learning, and give back. I once worried it might not sound serious enough, but people loved its honesty and simplicity.

Over the past decade, I have learned that **clarity of purpose is everything.** When life feels uncertain or paths divide, step back and reconnect with your values. Realignment takes courage, but when your “why” is clear, even the hardest choices become chances to grow.

Mindset drives transformation. Growth is rarely tidy; it begins messy and uncomfortable. Start anyway, before clarity or perfection arrive. Each time you show up, even when it is hard, you build competence, and competence builds confidence. Progress lives outside the comfort zone.

Corporate leadership relies on structure and predictability, while entrepreneurship calls for agility, vision, and strong relationships. Success comes from networks, mentors, and collaboration. **Perfection is a myth.** What matters most is focus, direction, and consistency.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer during my toughest role. It taught me that while I cannot control everything, I can influence my mindset, choices, and energy. I learned to rest, listen to my body, and respect balance. When I returned to work, I eventually chose a new path. Discipline has become the quiet force behind entrepreneurship: showing up, acting with integrity, and leading by example. I remind myself daily, “Would my children be proud to read this in the newspaper?”

No business succeeds alone. The right people turn vision into reality. Talent, trust, and shared purpose matter more than any single idea. As Richard Branson said, “Train people well enough so they can leave, but treat them well enough so they do not want to.”

Having control of my time is now my greatest reward. “Who Says I Can’t” is not just a name; it is a daily challenge I set for myself, to act despite fear, to serve despite fatigue, and to build despite uncertainty. **Entrepreneurship is not simply a career shift;** it is a character shift that tests your values, faith, and patience. I have had my share of cold sweats in the middle of the night during these ten short months, yet I grow stronger each day by focusing on the positives and learning from mistakes. The process of learning has been tremendously rewarding.



Soheil Mirahmadi

Co-Founder & CEO of Kimia Journey Travel and Tourism – UAE



- 1) **Focus deeply on your mental clarity and physical resilience**, your energy fuels everything, especially on your down days. Be prepared for moments that feel like the end of the world. Expect those hits; otherwise, handling shock and depression becomes nearly impossible.
- 2) **Secure your personal finances to cover your lifestyle** for at least a few years. Do not downgrade your life just to chase a dream. This is your life, so enjoy every opportunity along the way.
- 3) **Learn to raise capital quickly and adapt to your ecosystem** through active networking. It is as important as your actual product.
- 4) **Trust your gut**. The market is noisy. Focus on solving real problems, not on pleasing people around you.
- 5) **Invest in people**. Only work with those who are smarter in their domain and aligned with your values.
- 6) **Nothing real comes from endless planning**. Build it, break it, rebuild it better. The market will shape your direction faster than any whiteboard ever could.
- 7) **Entrepreneurship is not about being safe or perfect**. It is about momentum, clarity, and an obsession with progress. Define small wins, and let yourself get addicted to celebrating those moments.



Mariam Shaikh

Founder & CEO of MS Education Consultants – UAE



I took my first entrepreneurial step at the age of 23, establishing a small nursery school with little more than passion, vision, and a desire to shape young minds. What began as a modest initiative gradually evolved into a lifelong commitment to learning and leadership, expanding from early education to K-12 schools and eventually into higher education, where I had the privilege of leading major educational institutions. Throughout this journey, I remained driven by a single vision: to **create opportunities and positively impact lives through education**.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is that **success is not a linear path**. In my early days, I was eager to make an immediate impact, often driven by the desire to achieve perfection. I believed that to succeed, every step needed to be flawless. Over the years, I realized that **growth often comes from embracing imperfections and learning from mistakes**. It is the willingness to reflect, adapt, and keep moving forward that truly defines progress. Each challenge presented an opportunity to refine my leadership style, enhance my problem-solving skills, and build resilience.

Leading diverse teams and institutions taught me the significance of authenticity and empathy. Whether guiding a small group of passionate educators or managing large academic organizations, I found that the **most profound impact comes from being genuine and approachable**. When leaders are transparent and empathetic, it fosters an environment where creativity and collaboration thrive. It builds a culture of trust, where everyone feels valued and motivated to contribute.

After 35 years as a senior leader, I returned to my entrepreneurial roots, this time with a wealth of experience, a deeper understanding of leadership, and the clarity that only time and challenge can offer. The decision to establish MS Education Consultants was born from the desire to bridge the gap between aspirations and opportunities for students. I wanted to use my insights to guide others on their educational journeys, fostering talent and empowering individuals to realize their potential.

If I could offer advice to my younger self, it would be this: **Trust your instincts, but be patient with your path**. Every stage, from humble beginnings to high-level leadership, holds lessons that shape you. **Do not chase perfection; pursue purpose**. Build with integrity, lead with empathy, and never underestimate the power of reinvention. The journey may twist and turn, but with vision and values, it will always lead somewhere meaningful.

The essence of leadership, I have discovered, lies in staying grounded, embracing change, and never losing sight of your purpose. It is about creating a legacy that goes beyond personal achievements, one that empowers others to grow, thrive, and make a difference. Stay committed to your vision, be open to learning, and remain resilient in the face of challenges. **The path may not always be clear**, but with passion and perseverance, it will lead to a fulfilling and impactful journey.



Brian J. Esposito

Founder of Esposito Intellectual Enterprises | CEO at Diamond Lake Minerals (\$DLMI) – USA

When people ask what advice I'd give my younger self, my answer is always the same: nothing. Every challenge, setback, and win shaped me into who I am today. Without those experiences, I would not have become resilient, grateful, driven, and passionate. I learned that there is almost always a solution, and that everything happens for a reason.

This is why I work with founders and young entrepreneurs. I share what I have learned, but I also know they must experience hardship themselves. Shielding them from pain would rob them of lessons that build strength. Experiencing both the good and the bad taught me to quickly recognize outcomes when meeting new people and to decide where my time and energy should go. For much of my career I was the problem solver, which opened extraordinary doors. Today I focus less on fixing problems and more on preventing them. That, to me, is real freedom: the ability to say no.

Too many people are forced to say yes to situations that feel wrong because of bills and obligations. **True freedom is being able to walk away while still meeting your needs.** This should be a basic human right, along with food, water, clothing, and shelter. Life can change in an instant. As long as you work hard, push forward, and act ethically, you are always one call, message, or meeting away from success. And success is personal. For me, it is not wealth or possessions. Success is moving through life without harming others, and making things right if you ever do.

Momentum is everything. Keep moving and surround yourself with people who support you. That is not always your first circle of family and friends. They may not understand your entrepreneurial journey and can add pressure instead of encouragement. You need them to remain a safe space. The second circle you build along the way is where you share the struggles and triumphs, because they live it too and can refuel you when times are hard.

It is easy to wish you had known earlier what you know now, but without the lessons you lose the value. Hardships and breakthroughs shape you into someone strong enough to pass wisdom on to others. That is what this limited time is for. For over 24 years, my company motto has been: **Time Is Our Most Precious Commodity.** The sooner you respect it, the sooner you will choose carefully who and what you give it to. I often explain it like this: there are 86,400 seconds in a day. If someone stole 10 dollars from a bank account of 86,400 dollars, you wouldn't waste the rest chasing it. So if someone adds 10 seconds of negativity to your day, don't waste the other 86,390 seconds on it.

I created one quote that I use as often as possible: **"Everyone can be an overnight success if you wake up each day a little smarter, a little wiser, and a little stronger than the day before."**



ESPOSITO INTELLECTUAL ENTERPRISES
LLC
TIME IS OUR MOST PRECIOUS COMMODITY



DIAMONDLAKE



Angelique Letizia

Founder & CEO of Starr Films – USA



The advice that changed everything for me came from my late friend Ruth, after I had been cracked open, let down, burned out, and brought to my knees more times than I can count.

“Your energy is sacred. Protect it with your life... because it is your life.” Her words have stayed with me for over a decade, especially in the moments when life shattered me again and again, forcing me to find the pieces of myself that held real power. Not the kind the world gives you through titles or achievements, but the kind born in the quiet fire of survival.

I have trusted the wrong people and stayed in the wrong rooms. I gave my light to places that could not hold it. But every misalignment was an initiation. And I am grateful for every single one. Each heartbreak, failure, and detour led me back to my heart.

As a self-made, heart-led entrepreneur, every story I tell and every move I make must be rooted in energetic alignment. When I finally began treating my energy as sacred, everything shifted. Alignment found me. Peace found me. And suddenly, my path lit up from within.

Here is what I have learned above all else:

- 1) When you are energetically aligned, you do not have to chase what is meant for you. You attract it.
- 2) When your vibration is clear, grounded, and high, you become a magnet for the life you were born to live.
- 3) Every dream, every connection, and every opportunity begins to flow.

True success does not come from the hustle. It comes from the heart. So protect your energy as if your future depends on it. Because it does. And always, keep shining.



Jure Laharnar

Founder of Underdog – Slovenia

UNDERDOG

If I were starting my entrepreneurial journey again, I would remind myself to **be patient and trustworthy**, not to fake success but to build it. Today I know that the goal is not to be the smartest person in the room but to be humble enough to listen, learn, and recognize when it is time for persistence and when it is time to pivot. Ego can cost you years. Focus rewards you with results.

Entrepreneurship is not glamour. It is a path of self-reflection, failures, and small wins that no one sees. But if you persist, keep pushing, and stay true to yourself, one day you realize you have gone from an underdog to a player who writes their own rules. **It is a privilege to overcome tough challenges you chose yourself.**

Everything else is just noise. As many people as know you, that many versions of truth about you exist. Most critics have never risked anything, so **do not take others' opinions personally**. They are only mirrors of themselves. Compassion is one of the most powerful tools.

You are not your thoughts. Attention can rest on only one thing at a time, so do not forget to feel. When I learned to observe my mind instead of believing it, I felt freedom for the first time. I stopped trying to silence the critic and the judge within me. I simply noticed them, followed the feelings they stirred, and let them pass. **Peace comes when you stop taking the noise in your head personally.**

If you want to play the long game, you must create the conditions that allow you to stay in it. That means taking care of yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally. Learning to let go of the parts of yourself that no longer serve you. Not competing, but understanding. Not proving, but creating. Not searching for happiness, but allowing it to happen. Because when you stay in the game long enough, true to yourself and present in the moment, happiness eventually finds you. Everything is exactly as it should be. **Find your way beyond the mind, and there you will find freedom.**



Yulia Stark

Founder & President of EWA (European Women's Association) – Belgium



Your network is your net worth. But here is the truth most people overlook: **You cannot fast-track trust.** If you are building a company, start building real relationships just as early. The doors you will need to open, will not open because of a cold pitch. They will open because someone knows your name, your values, and your story.

So how do you build a high-trust, high-impact network, especially with investors, policymakers, and top leaders?

- 1) **Stop Pitching, Start Connecting:** Lead with curiosity and ask thoughtful questions. People back founders they respect, not just those with good decks. Your story matters, but your intention matters more. Do not approach people only for funding or promotion. Build trust first; investors support people, not ideas.
- 2) **Find Shared Purpose:** Align around a mission you both care about, such as social impact, sustainability, or innovation. Shared values create real connection. Common purpose opens more doors than credentials ever will.
- 3) **Warm Intros Win:** Forget cold messages. Focus on nurturing two or three key champions who can vouch for you. They will open rooms you cannot walk into alone. The best introductions come from people who genuinely vouch for you, not just those who click "connect." Spend time cultivating your champions: mentors, early adopters, collaborators. These are the people who will speak your name in rooms you are not yet in.
- 4) **Craft a Story That Resonates:** Your startup is more than a product; it is your journey. Tell your "why" with heart and clarity. A concise, memorable, and honest story makes people want to invest or collaborate.
- 5) **Respect Timing and Context:** Not every moment is a pitch moment. Learn to read the room and follow up when it counts. Real influence comes from consistency. Check in with your network without always asking for something. Offer value, such as introductions, insights, or thoughtful commentary. Give before you ask.
- 6) **Offer a Clear Value Exchange:** Ask yourself: What can I offer them? Whether it is data, visibility, or expertise, bring something meaningful to the table.
- 7) **Follow Up with Intention:** Personalize your outreach and reference the conversation. Stay top of mind through thoughtful touches, not spammy check-ins.
- 8) **Reflect and Refine:** After every key interaction, ask yourself: what worked, what did not, and what will I do better next time?
- 9) **Bonus for Founders:** Have a one-line mission statement ready. In high-stakes networking moments, such as conferences, panels, or dinners, be ready to introduce yourself in one powerful sentence that explains who you are and why your mission matters. In rooms full of powerful people, clarity and conviction cut through.



Daniel Wilsher

Founder of LivEdX Learning – UK



I want to write this advice to 24-year-old Daniel, who was just about to start in the world of entrepreneurship. To give context, I'm on business number five, working on LivEdX and Orb Drinks, and still feel at the beginning of my journey. There have been many mistakes and setbacks, and I wouldn't say I feel "successful" (yet), but all of that is to be expected. So my first advice would be: **Expect to be humbled.**

You don't have to do it all alone. I spent years believing I needed to prove myself by being competent in every area of business and punished myself for the skills I lacked instead of valuing the ones I had. Play to your strengths and build support around your weak points.

Entrepreneurship is demanding, so **your support system must be strong** both personally and professionally. Advisors, mentors, and people who truly understand this path will help you survive the storms that inevitably come.

Your smartest investment will always be the one you make within yourself. Entrepreneurs should live like athletes; your mental and physical systems determine your capacity. Learn how you operate: what foods help or hinder you, when you should exercise, how your energy changes throughout the day, and what routines keep your mind calm. For me, breathwork, meditation, and visualisation create stability, self-belief, and ground me in the day.

Choose relationships carefully. The right people, whether in business, friendship, or romantic life, can elevate you far beyond what you can do alone. The wrong ones can pull you backward. Lean on those who understand the entrepreneurial experience and can support you on the hard days.

Finally, stay close to your purpose. Every time I've strayed toward something "shiny," it's led to confusion and difficulty. **Focus on what aligns with your mission,** remove what doesn't, and have the humility to say no.

Wherever you are on your journey, remember the **dream is the building itself:** solving problems, facing adversity, learning, failing, and rising again. If you change the world along the way, even better.



Kate Vitasek

Founder of Vested | Distinguished Fellow at Global Supply Chain Institute (University of Tennessee) – USA



My advice is simple: when you want to do great things, **you need to find great people to help you**. The best results come when genuine value creation happens as you move from transactional thinking to relational thinking. This shift in mindset has been at the heart of every successful partnership I have witnessed or facilitated.

Too many businesses approach relationships, whether with suppliers, customers, or partners, as zero-sum games where one party's gain is another's loss. When parties align around outcomes rather than activities and focus on "What's in it for we?" instead of "What's in it for me?", extraordinary results follow.

My core advice for any entrepreneurial journey:

- 1) **Build trust through transparency:** Share information openly with your partners and stakeholders. Transparency is not weakness; it is the foundation of collaborative innovation. When everyone understands the full picture, better decisions emerge.
- 2) **Design for mutual success:** Structure your partnerships and agreements around shared outcomes and long-term value creation, not just cost reduction or short-term wins. This requires moving beyond conventional contract thinking toward relationship thinking.
- 3) **Embrace constructive conflict:** Healthy partnerships are not conflict-free; they are environments where different perspectives are welcomed and worked through collaboratively. The best solutions often emerge from respectful disagreement.
- 4) **Invest in relationship infrastructure:** Just as you invest in technology and talent, invest in building governance structures, communication rhythms, and cultural alignment that make partnerships thrive.

The entrepreneurial journey is not a solo expedition. It is about orchestrating a network of relationships that create value no one could achieve alone. Choose your partners wisely, invest in those relationships authentically, and design for mutual success from the start.



Priyanka Sengar

Founder & CEO of Women First Jobs – UAE



If I could go back and whisper something to my younger self at the very start of my entrepreneurial journey, I'd probably laugh first and say, **"Buckle up, this ride is nothing like you imagined!"** When I left behind a stable, high-flying job to build Women First Jobs, I thought passion alone would carry me through. I believed that if you had a great idea and worked hard, the path would somehow unfold smoothly. Spoiler alert... it didn't.

There were days when I questioned everything: the sleepless nights, the rejections, the people who didn't believe in me, and the self-doubt that crept in when doors kept closing. But those very challenges became the teachers I never knew I needed. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that **you have to start before you feel ready** because waiting for the perfect timing is just fear in disguise. The real magic lies in taking those imperfect steps forward.

Along the way, you'll realize that **entrepreneurship doesn't have to be lonely**; it's about surrounding yourself with the right people, a tribe that challenges you, believes in you, and walks beside you through the ups and downs. And most importantly, you have to play the long game. Success rarely comes overnight, and every rejection or "no" isn't the end of the road, it's simply a redirection toward something better.

Today, when I see Women First Jobs growing into a movement that uplifts women's careers and voices, I know every stumble was worth it. If I had to sum it up for my younger self: Trust yourself more, worry less, and remember you're not just building a company, **you're building change**.



Ismail Tekin

Founder & CEO of The World Impacteurs and World Impact Forum – UAE

If I could start over with everything I have learned, I would **focus more on the people** around me. It is not just about chasing money. I would spend more time building genuine connections and looking for those key individuals who truly add something special, not just in business, but in how they enrich the journey.

It is about giving as much as you get, creating relationships that are truly two-way streets. **The entrepreneurial path can be quite lonely, but it does not have to be.** It is about finding your tribe, the kind of people who inspire you, challenge you, and cheer you on.

I would dive deeper into working with partners and accelerators, not just for the sake of expanding my business, but to be part of something bigger and more meaningful. **It is about making a difference together and enjoying every step of the way.**



Seymour Rasulov

Co-Founder of Whelp – USA

If I were starting Whelp AI again, knowing what I know now, here is the advice I would give myself, and maybe it is useful for anyone building something ambitious:

- 1) **Solve real problems, not trendy ones:** Focus on enterprise workflows, the messy, expensive, internal processes that actually slow companies down. That is where the real value is. Do not get distracted by surface-level use cases.
- 2) **Build your go-to-market engine early:** We were late to do this. A great product is only half the battle. The other half is getting it into the right hands. Start building outbound systems, sales playbooks, and strategic partnerships from day one.
- 3) **Pitch with clarity, not hype:** Investors care about traction, team, and a believable path to ROI. Reverse-engineer your pitch from the customer's pain point, not from the tech stack.
- 4) **Trust your instincts:** Especially when they are uncomfortable. They are usually pointing to something important. I was scared to do so because I thought I might fail, but the real failure is not listening to your gut feelings.





Maria Dolores

Founder of The Human Contract Foundation – Sweden



If I could offer one piece of advice to future entrepreneurs, it would be this: **Trust that every step, even the sideways ones, is part of your becoming.**

There were times in my journey when I felt lost, stuck, or off track, like when I stepped away from leadership work to help a friend in her funeral business. On the surface, it may have looked like a detour. But in truth, it deepened my understanding of life, grief, and what really matters. It matured me in ways no book ever could.

I don't claim to have "made it." I still feel like I am in the becoming. But that is the heart of entrepreneurship: **Not a title or destination, but a way of being.** A willingness to keep going. To learn from each meeting, each misstep, each moment of unexpected grace.

Success, in my experience, does not arrive with fireworks. It begins quietly, with the decision to believe in your own voice, even when others do not understand the vision yet. To stay kind and curious when things get hard. And to **mature through every encounter, even the painful ones.**

Your journey will be your own. And that is the point. But you are not alone. Keep going. It is worth it.



Abdullah Al Salmani

Co-Founder & CEO of SpacePoint – UAE



Seize every opportunity, especially in the early stages of your career. Attend events, get involved, and stay curious. Looking back, some of the most transformative moments in my entrepreneurial journey came from simply showing up, participating in events, meeting founders, asking smart questions, and truly listening to what the market and ecosystem had to say. These experiences not only expanded my perspective but also led to valuable connections that became the foundation of our startup's growth.

From those interactions, I learned how to build a strong advisory board, how to recruit brilliant early-stage interns (many of whom I met at events), and how to shape our startup with their support. These students became our first heroes, and their contributions were instrumental in building what we have today. Over time, many of them grew into our first passionate employees, carrying the same dedication and belief in the mission that they started with. Their growth became part of our growth story.

Another key piece of advice would be to prepare your **pitch early and practice it often**, whether it is a one-minute version, a three-minute summary, or a full five-minute pitch. Having a refined narrative ready opened doors for me not only in competitions but also when meeting potential investors and strategic partners. People are willing to help, but you need to be able to clearly communicate your vision and ask for the right kind of support.

So if I were starting again, I would tell myself: **Show up, ask questions, build connections, and always be ready to pitch your purpose**. The rest will follow.



Patricia Burlaud

Founder & CEO of P. Burlaud Consulting – USA



If I were starting over, I'd **begin by understanding how intelligence is built**, not just cultivated through mentors and experience, but increasingly engineered through code. Engaging with AI earlier would have sharpened my strategic lens, helping me recognize patterns more quickly and frame complexity with greater precision. Physics taught me to think in first principles. AI, I suspect, would have tested those principles against real-world volatility.

I'd also **train both sides of my mind from the outset**. Logic without imagination is like a compass without a map. Philosophy and the arts taught me to navigate ambiguity, spot nuance, and hear signals beneath the noise. In today's AI-driven environment, meaningful leadership sits at the intersection of rigor and creativity.

Let courage be practical. I've worked through coups in West Africa, through epidemics before COVID, and through the pandemic itself while caring for my husband in his final illness. Those seasons redefined strength, not the performative kind, but the type that shows up, takes the next right step, and closes chapters cleanly so new ones can begin without baggage.

Choose rooms over titles, environments where values align with the pace of growth I kept a decision ledger, allowing pattern recognition and compounding insight. And I protected my energy, sleep, movement, and stillness with the same vigilance I gave to financials, because energy, I've learned, is a founder's most finite resource.

Most importantly, I've learned to **teach while learning**. Coaching transformed instinct into frameworks. It made tacit knowledge transferable. And I've seen firsthand how individual growth scales into teams, into organizations, into entire ecosystems. That ripple effect is why I continue this work: connecting ideas across sectors, making it real for people, and leading with both clarity and warmth.



Carol Constant

Founder & CEO of WhomLab – Czechia



One of the most underrated assets for a founder is a well-crafted LinkedIn profile, and I don't mean posting. Forget posting for now; that may or may not come later. What truly matters first are your permanent sections. Before investors, partners, or potential hires meet you, they will likely search your name. What they find on your profile sets the tone for trust and credibility. **That first impression can make or break an opportunity.**

Having spent years in HR, I've reviewed hundreds of profiles. Most people underestimate the impact a strong profile makes, or how damaging a weak one can be. The good news is that improving yours is easier than you think. Start with your headline. Don't just list your title; make it clear what you do and the value you bring. Instead of "CEO at X," try "Founder | HR tech hiring and managing high-performing teams." Add awards or credentials if you have them. Instantly, you communicate mission and authority. The About section is your pitch, and it is extremely important. In three or four short paragraphs, share what drives you and what your company does. Keep it human and engaging. Think of it like a Netflix series: each paragraph is an episode. If they enjoy one, they'll keep reading. The Featured section is your highlight reel. Include media, press, traction, and key wins. Show what they can't miss. Licenses, certifications, and skills matter too. Don't skip them, as they reinforce credibility. Pro tip: LinkedIn gives you one free month of Premium each year. Use it to complete relevant certifications and keep showcasing your expertise. Recommendations are gold. A handful of genuine endorsements from clients, advisors, or teammates can do more for your credibility than paragraphs of self-promotion.

Think of your LinkedIn page as your digital storefront. **Before anyone invests in your startup, they invest in you. Make it count.**



Mariano Anthony Davies

Co-Founder & President of PBO-OBS Global Group – Denmark



The problem with giving good advice at the end of a career is recognizing that society has changed more in the last 100 years than in the previous 1,000 years, and these changes will continue to accelerate. However, even with that in mind, success at any time requires the ability to think outside the box and adapt your plan and strategy to meet market needs and conditions. **Tunnel vision is the most dangerous red flag.** What worked yesterday may not work tomorrow.

Success also comes to those able to assemble the right team and to create a working environment where everyone feels that their contribution is appreciated. Allow people to make mistakes as this is part of the process that will lead to innovation, growth and success. In other words, **empower people to think out of the box** and create a positive competitive environment (team spirit) that recognizes that every cog in the figurative wheel (process – person) is important.



Yaniv Bernstein

Founder of The Startup Podcast – Australia



The advice I would give my younger self is not to overanalyze, not to be so afraid of failure, and simply to get started. **Building a company is an iterative game.** It is more like going to the gym, training for a sport, or learning a musical instrument, where practice, failure, and iteration are how you get good.

You cannot sit in a dark room and become a virtuoso pianist. You need to practice a lot. It is the same with business. **If you want to succeed, you need to practice a lot.** And there is only one way to practice business: it is not writing business plans, it is not doing an MBA, and it is not just talking to friends. It is actually going out there and getting started.

Yes, in the first one or two iterations, you will probably get punched in the face. But **you will get better and better.** Eventually, without even realizing it, you will find that you have become pretty good, and that you are far ahead of where you would have been if you had spent all that time analyzing and thinking.

Get the reps in. Do it now. Do not worry if you fail, because **it is not really failure when you learn so much from doing it.**



Lady Elizabeth Kelly

Founder & President of The Lady Elizabeth Kelly Family Office – UAE



If I were starting my journey again, I'd tell myself this: **Life is no fairytale**. The world isn't as kind or loyal as it looks. You'll meet people who'll call you their sister, their brother, their everything, but the moment money or power gets involved, you'll see who they really are. So don't give cash to anyone, don't do anything without documentation, and don't sign anything before you've read every single line, as it may cost you time, peace, and trust.

I'd tell my younger self to **stop depending on people so much**. Everyone talks big when things are easy, but when the storm hits, you're usually the one holding the wheel. So build yourself strong enough to carry the whole boat if you have to. And if someone betrays you, replace them, rebuild, move on. Don't cry over loyalty that was never real. This world is transactional, it changes fast, and you've got to have a strong heart if you want to survive in business.

I'd say **focus on your strengths**. Don't waste time trying to prove your worth to anyone who can't see it. Stay kind but don't be soft, stay calm but don't be quiet. I used to think people would value honesty and effort. They don't always. But they can never ignore consistency and results.

If I could talk to that girl again, I'd tell her: **Trust your vision, protect your energy, and stop rushing destiny**. What's meant for you will come, but you have to be brave enough to meet it halfway. Life will test you, people will disappoint you, but you'll always come out stronger. Just keep going.



Kuba Nagórski

Co-Founder & Head of Growth of LouderHigher – Poland



If I were to summarize the lessons that shaped my business journey, they would revolve around courage, discipline, and relationships.

I learned that **bold decisions are the fuel of progress**, but bold doesn't mean reckless. Every move I made was backed by a thoughtful risk assessment. The difference between bravery and foolishness is often a spreadsheet.

Youth is the best time to take big swings. When you have fewer obligations, you can afford to explore, fail fast, and learn faster. I used that time to experiment, build, and take paths others considered too uncertain, and those moments defined the trajectory of my career.

Growth compounds. For the first five years of running my business, I committed two hours every single day to learning, not from summaries or gurus, but straight from the source: books, founders, customers, and practitioners. Over time, that discipline became my competitive edge.

Relationships are the real long-term capital. I've always believed in nurturing my network with honesty and integrity so I would never have to feel ashamed to reach out. Today, I work with people I first met fifteen years ago.

And finally, **success is never solo.** Choose people whose life goals naturally drive them toward excellence. When ambition, purpose, and trust align, business becomes more than work; it becomes a shared mission.



Maria Chishti

Founder & Partnerships Advisor of Galaxy Management Consultancy |

Founder of McJZ International and WOMENPRENEUR | Publisher & Editor-in-Chief at MAG-PRENEUR – UAE

If I could sit across from my younger self, the dreamer who believed she could change the world, I would tell her this:

- 1) Everything that will happen is meant to shape you, not break you. Every challenge, every silence, every detour, it is all preparing you for what is ahead.
- 2) Don't rush the journey; build the foundation first.
- 3) Choose people carefully; energy is everything.
- 4) Failure is feedback, not a definition.
- 5) Lead with empathy, not with ego.
- 6) Balance passion with strategy.
- 7) Protect your peace; it is not a luxury, it is your anchor.
- 8) Believe in the ripple effect; keep giving, even when no one is watching.
- 9) Redefine success by impact, integrity, and inner peace; the world will always move the goalpost.
- 10) Celebrate small wins, as gratitude keeps the spirit grounded and purpose clear.
- 11) Keep evolving, keep learning, keep unlearning, and most importantly, keep believing that your journey is divinely timed.
- 12) You will stumble, you will soar, and you will start over more than once. But every time, you will rise stronger because you are becoming the person you once needed.





Hendrik Klein

Co-Founder of TalentiDo – Switzerland

talentiDO

If I were starting my entrepreneurial journey again, I would **focus on using one system to run the company** so there are no syncing errors, data loss, or distractions caused by too many tools. Build everything around this system so you can focus on business development.

Do extensive market research, talk to real decision-makers in your target groups, and start selling as early as possible to reach market and product fit. Even if you are very confident in your idea, do not invest too much time, money, or energy before achieving proof of concept and validation of both market and product fit.

Always stay skeptical if something sounds too good to be true. **Use your common sense.** The next opportunity will always come, so do not fall into the trap of FOMO.

If you get scammed, act immediately and do not wait. **Always sleep on it before making important decisions.**

Build morning routines to keep your body and mind fit. Eat and drink healthily. Go to bed before midnight and wake up after seven to eight hours of deep sleep. Health is number one. Number two is time. Do not get distracted by the wrong friends. Stay caring and loyal to your family. Invest money in passive income-generating assets such as residential real estate, staking crypto, trading algorithms, or building apps with automated processes.



Agnieszka (Aga) Elkhatib

Founder of Aga Khatib Marketing Services and Women in Tourism Middle East – UAE

Throughout my journey, the most powerful lesson I've learned is that **the hardest chapters of our lives are often the ones that shape us the most**, but only if we refuse to give up on ourselves. My path was far from easy; it demanded strength, resilience, and the courage to stand up each time life pushed me down. Yet, looking back, it was exactly those tough years that built my character, sharpened my intuition, and helped me become the woman I am today.

We live in an extremely competitive world, and for women especially, financial independence is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Women are naturally nurturing and emotional, which can sometimes make us vulnerable to manipulation or being placed in the shadow of other people's ambitions. That's why **having your own vision, goals, and personal roadmap is essential**. Invest in your skills, build your personal brand, and position yourself as an expert so you stand strong and unshakeable.

Hard times taught me leadership. Some say I am "too tough" or that I think like a man, and I smile, because in the real business world, **strength combined with emotional intelligence is a superpower**. Success requires courage, strategy, and the ability to balance heart with logic.

My advice to others: **Be ready for a journey that will challenge you**. You will meet people who doubt you or try to pull you down, and that's perfectly fine. Criticism is part of growth. Stay focused on your plan, strengthen your emotional resilience, surround yourself with people who inspire you, and make time to give back to your community.

Mistakes and failures are not signs of weakness; they are proof that you are brave enough to take risks. And risks are what build us, shape us, and lead us to our greatest achievements. Keep going, keep evolving, and trust that **every chapter is preparing you for the next level of your life**.





Liesa Euton

Director of MENA and Caribbean Region at EHP International – UAE



Throughout my career, personal growth, and life in general, one piece of advice has stood out more than any other: **Live in alignment with your values**. It sounds simple, but the truth behind this advice has been profound in shaping how I approach both my personal and professional life.

Many people chase success without defining what success truly means for them. It is easy to fall into the trap of measuring progress through titles, income, or approval from others. Yet even when you reach those milestones, you may still feel unsatisfied if your choices do not reflect who you are or what you believe in. The turning point comes when you **start asking yourself what truly matters to you**.

Take time to look inward. Ask what you care about, how you want to spend your time and energy, and what kind of impact you want to make. When you answer honestly, your priorities become clearer. Focus on work, projects, and goals that match your passions and values rather than external expectations. The more your actions align with what you believe in, the more natural confidence and motivation you will feel.

Authenticity also transforms relationships. Trying to please everyone or fit into expectations can make you lose connection with yourself and others. Real relationships are built on honesty, not perfection. Be genuine, even when it feels uncomfortable. **Focus on depth over quantity** and surround yourself with people who value you as you are. This kind of authenticity builds trust, peace, and long-lasting bonds.

Financially, learn to separate true freedom from image or social pressure. Spending to impress or to keep up rarely brings satisfaction. **Financial security comes from intention, not indulgence.** Live below your means, save consistently, and invest with a long-term mindset. The discipline may not look glamorous, but it creates stability and independence that allow you to make choices aligned with your values rather than external demands.

Your health deserves the same conscious attention. You cannot give your best to others if you are constantly running on empty. Remember the saying, "You can't pour from an empty cup." **Rest, nourishment, movement, and quiet moments are not luxuries, they are essentials.** Productivity and creativity thrive when you protect your energy instead of pushing past your limits.

Work-life balance is another area where many struggle. The truth is that **balance is not perfect or permanent.** It shifts with different seasons of life. Some periods will demand more focus on work, others on family, rest, or personal growth. Learn to accept those shifts without guilt. Balance is about flexibility and awareness, not control.

Ultimately, the **foundation of a fulfilled life rests on four principles**: authenticity, alignment with values, responsibility, and self-care. These guideposts help you stay centered when life becomes complex. Reflect on what truly matters to you and be willing to adjust your path when it drifts away from your core values. Living intentionally and authentically will bring satisfaction that goes deeper than success. It will create meaning that lasts.



Larry Namer

Co-Founder of E! Entertainment TV Networks | Chairman at LJN Media – USA

When I was a young manager at Manhattan Cable TV, then owned by Time Inc., they appointed a president named Nick Nicholas. He was very tough and demanded excellence, but he always said, **“Be firm but fair.”** That phrase stayed with me throughout my career.

Hire the best, smartest, and hardest-working people you can, but make sure they understand that you will always treat them fairly. When I started, I focused too much on what had happened in the past and let that drive my decisions. Over time, I realized **it’s far more important to look ahead and think about what can be better**, not just what was.

That mindset is especially true in industries driven by technology. Today, it’s hard to keep up with the pace of change, but if you don’t anticipate what’s coming and prepare for those capabilities, you’ll likely be left behind.



Filip Zolota

Founder & CEO of MAOIO AGENCY (ZOTEH Group) – Croatia

On my entrepreneurial path, the key turning point was realizing that what I do doesn’t matter nearly as much as how I do it, as long as it aligns with my values, beliefs, and creates real value for the client.

Over the years, I’ve learned that entering any kind of collaboration isn’t about excitement; it’s about understanding and managing risk. That’s why I always **enter every business relationship as a partner**, never as a service provider. A service provider gets the job done. A partner builds the result.

And no matter the business vertical, clients have never been just another record in the CRM. They’re people building something of their own, just like me. And if they’re in it for the long run, they’re not looking for executors; they’re looking for partners.

Because those who seek a service get a performer. **Those who seek a partner get growth.**





Michelle Raymond

Founder of The People's Partner (Leadership Consultancy) – UK, UAE



Too often we fall into the trap of becoming who we think the world wants us to be. My advice? **Stop pretending and start preparing.** Rehearse the version of yourself that you are quietly growing into, the one that is values-led, self-defined, and unapologetically focused.

Let's talk about work-life balance. For me, that concept doesn't quite fit. I believe in work-life integration. **You can't have everything at once.** Business is like a seesaw. Perfect balance sounds good, but in reality it keeps everything stuck. The movement, the momentum, the growth, it comes from the shift, the sacrifice, the intentional tilt. There are seasons when work takes the front seat. Other times, life demands your full presence. The key is knowing which way to lean, and when.

One question that has helped me make those decisions is this:

"What one goal, if achieved, would ease or eliminate a cluster of other goals?"

For many entrepreneurs, that answer is financial stability. Once that is in place, you create breathing room for your health, for your family, and for bigger impact. That does not mean chasing money for its own sake. It means giving yourself the freedom to **focus on what really matters.**

And let me be clear: none of this happens in isolation. Business is built on relationships. **People fuel your growth.**

Here's what I've learned about building meaningful connections:

- 1) **Give first:** Buy from them before you ask them to buy from you.
- 2) **Champion others:** Recommend, refer, and cheer loudly and without expectation.
- 3) **Lead with care:** Relationships thrive where compassion lives.

You cannot make withdrawals from relationships you have never deposited into. Start there, and everything else becomes easier.



Andrej Šolinc

CEO at CEED Slovenia – Slovenia



Entrepreneurship is not just a career; it is a mirror that shows you who you are, what you believe, and where your limits lie. I would advise myself to stop trying to reduce mistakes and instead learn from them faster. Mistakes are an essential part of growth. You can learn from others, but that learning is limited. In the end, you must walk your own path and step on a few mines yourself, just maybe not from A to Z. The goal is not to avoid mistakes but to shorten the mistake to learning cycle.

Remember that at any moment, you are the best version of yourself so far. Growth is the purpose; life continuously presents challenges just big enough for you to overcome. Once you do, new ones appear. I would advise myself not to chase perfection, but to understand growth and, more importantly, to understand yourself.

I would advise myself to **stop seeking validation from others.** Vision often feels lonely at the start. Trust your instincts more. That doesn't mean ignoring others, but to surround yourself with a few strong mentors who challenge you, not just agree. I would advise myself to find a coach early on to help interpret mistakes, strengthen your mindset, and build resilience.

Entrepreneurship demands mental toughness. There will always be uncertainty, setbacks, and self doubt. Resilience isn't just about pushing harder; it's about maintaining balance. Healthy relationships and interests outside business keep you grounded when everything else feels uncertain. One thing I wouldn't change is persistence. It matters more than the perfect idea or flawless execution. Ideas are easy. Execution is learnable. Persistence is a mindset. **Often, the difference between success and failure is simply the willingness to continue after others stop.**

Avoid the trap of perfectionism. It slows you down and blocks experimentation. **Focus on progress through trial and error,** learning by doing, iterating, and improving. It is often easier to ask for forgiveness than wait for permission. That mindset enables speed, creativity, and adaptability.

People forgive almost anything except weakness. Confidence and clarity are contagious; hesitation is not. **Act with conviction while staying humble enough to admit when you're wrong.** Who you work with matters as much as what you work on. I would advise myself to be far more deliberate about business partners, collaborators, and clients. Skills can be learned, but shared values, trust, and energy alignment cannot. Seek true win win win relationships that benefit you, your partners, and your customers. Business built on that foundation is sustainable and fulfilling. The wrong partnerships can be costly both emotionally and financially.

If I were to summarize entrepreneurship in one phrase, it would be lifelong learning. I would keep investing in learning, not only about my industry but also about psychology, communication, leadership, and myself. Every time you hit a wall, it means you've reached the limit of your understanding. Expanding it opens new possibilities. **Curiosity is a superpower.** It keeps you adaptable in a world that changes faster than ever.

And if this thought experiment involved time travel, I'd still buy bitcoin. Joking aside, it carries a truth: small, smart decisions compound over time. You don't need to get everything right, just a few key things, consistently. **Entrepreneurship is not about "making it"; it's about becoming.** Every challenge is a mirror, every mistake a lesson, and every small win a step toward a better version of yourself. Growth never ends, and that is what makes the journey worth taking.



Julie Lewis

Founder of Julie Lewis – UAE



If I could go back and give my younger self advice at the start of this journey from the corporate world to the Himalayas and Antarctica, I would not change the adventure but the lens through which I viewed it.

- 1) **Study Artificial and Human Intelligence:** The world has shifted from analog to digital. I would learn AI not to code but to understand the new language of creativity and commerce, while never losing sight of emotional and social intelligence. The future belongs to those who connect technology with empathy and wisdom.
- 2) **Explore Philosophy and Art:** Early years were about achievement, later ones about alignment. Philosophy and art teach depth, perspective, and presence. I would study Stoicism for calm, Taoism for flow, and Japanese aesthetics for beauty in imperfection.
- 3) **Connect the Dots Earlier:** My path from fitness to leadership now looks like one story. Every experience is connected. Stay curious, keep a journal, reflect often, and patterns will reveal purpose.
- 4) **Redefine Success:** Achievement without alignment is exhaustion. Success means coherence between values, actions, and environment. Let your calendar reflect your calling.
- 5) **Invest in Health, Wealth, and Relationships:** Energy is the real currency. Prioritize rest, nature, and movement. Learn about investing and nurture uplifting people. Everything compounds, so start early and consciously.
- 6) **Learn Stillness:** Slowing down does not mean losing momentum. Stillness brings clarity and intuition. The greatest breakthroughs happen in quiet moments.
- 7) **Do Not Outsource Your Power:** Confidence built on applause disappears in silence. Trust your inner compass and act even when uncertain.
- 8) **Let Nature Be Your Mentor:** Mountains teach presence, rivers flow, forests connect, oceans surrender. The best lessons come from nature itself.
- 9) **Embrace Regenerative Living:** Move from exhaustion to renewal, from surviving to thriving. Regeneration begins within, in how you live, lead, and love.
- 10) **Be Courageously Curious:** Curiosity opens doors that fear keeps locked. You do not need all the answers, only better questions.

If I were starting again, I'd remind myself that the ultimate journey isn't up a mountain or across an ocean, it's inward. Toward wisdom, wholeness, and wonder. That every summit reached, every book written, every life touched... begins with one simple question: Who am I becoming through this experience? That's the real adventure!



Simon Doble

Founder & Global CEO of Barefoot Citizens – USA |

Founder & Chair of SolarBuddy – Australia | Founder & Chair of BrightBeam – UAE

barefoot
CITIZENS



If I were starting again, I would remind myself that success is not defined by titles, valuations, or awards. It is defined by whether you are making the world better, and whether you can look back and say: I showed up fully, gave generously, and stayed true to my values. So to every entrepreneur reading this: Be relentless in your vision, kind in your leadership, and fierce in your belief that business can be a force for good.

- 1) **Lead With Purpose, Always:** From the start, align your business with a deeper mission. I did not just want to build a company; I wanted to solve a systemic injustice. That clarity gave me resilience when times were tough and helped me say no to distractions. Do not chase money; chase impact. Revenue follows when you solve meaningful problems.
- 2) **Be Bold, But Know When to Listen:** Entrepreneurship requires courage and humility. I have taken bold steps; some worked, others did not. Each time I listened to communities, partners, or a child receiving a SolarBuddy light, I gained insights that reshaped my work. Trust your instincts, but refine them through the voices of those you serve.
- 3) **Build Relationships, Not Just Networks:** Business is about people. Treat every partner, donor, employee, and volunteer as a collaborator. The relationships built across corporates, NGOs, and governments became the foundation of SolarBuddy's success. Invest deeply in people, not transactions.
- 4) **Sustain Yourself to Sustain Others:** Burnout helps no one. Early in my journey, I pushed beyond my limits. I later learned that protecting health and balance is not optional; it is essential. You cannot light up others' worlds if your own flame has gone out.
- 5) **Financial Discipline Fuels Freedom:** Purpose-driven ventures often overlook financial health, but sustainability is what enables scale. Know your numbers, respect cash flow, and manage resources wisely. Being mission-driven and financially disciplined work together.
- 6) **Embrace Iteration, Not Perfection:** SolarBuddy began with a simple idea to help children study after dark. That idea evolved through testing, learning, and failure. If I had waited for perfection, I would never have started. Begin, adapt, improve. Progress matters more than perfection.
- 7) **Do Not Underestimate the Power of Story:** Your story is your greatest asset. People connect with missions and movements, not just products. Share your story authentically, whether pitching partners or speaking publicly. A powerful story inspires belief and action.
- 8) **Legacy Is Built in the Moments You Do Not See:** True impact is often invisible. It lives in a child's smile under a solar light, in a local job created, or in a team member who found purpose. Measure success by lives changed, not only by metrics achieved.



Tove Lovisa Bergkvist

Founder & CEO of Real Dubai – UAE



I have started many businesses, both on my own and with others. What I have realized from a deeper perspective is that **sales are truly at the core of any business**. Focusing early on understanding who your client is and testing your product or service in the market will help you tremendously along the way. When you make this a priority from the start, you are much more likely to build a sustainable business model with lasting success.

Entrepreneurship is a journey of trial and error, and not all brilliant ideas turn into successful outcomes. It's easy to view your business or idea from a holistic perspective, see only its positive aspects, and keep building without focusing on the one thing that determines whether your business will survive long term.

Another key factor in becoming successful is the ability to understand yourself: to know what truly motivates you, how you make decisions best, and how you move forward in the most aligned and authentic way. **As you build a business, you are also building yourself**, with a deeper sense of purpose. The more you align your actions with your true values and strengths, the more naturally success follows.

Be brave enough to start before you are ready, to test, adjust, and grow. **Every step teaches you something valuable**, and those lessons become the foundation for everything that follows.



Leo Thompson

Founder of Edsplorer – Austria



Starting a business teaches you countless lessons. Over the years I have gathered many from my entrepreneurial journey, and some I wish I had embraced much earlier.

1) **Systematically groom your network and relationships:** In many ways this is an old business mantra, yet one that I should have given greater attention. Networking and building relationships still requires the cultivation of good systems and organisation, and I definitely did the first better than the latter. Initially, I was not organised enough in building a systemic approach to contact management and tracking my interactions with people. Most of my business has now come from people I already knew or who were introduced to me through a trusted contact, and I should have intentionally focused on building their awareness of what I was able to offer. I wasted a lot of time on cold digital outreach, too many emails into spam folders, when I should have knocked on the doors of those I knew and told them about what I was doing so they would come to me when the time was right. Seems obvious, right?

2) **Be honestly self-aware and build habits that compensate for your weaknesses:** We all have different personal qualities, involving both strengths and opportunities for growth. Focus and discipline have not been natural strengths for me, especially when it comes to activities I find dull. I can be a bit impulsive and put off vital business basics, such as targeted client outreach, in favour of design, research, product development, and leading workshops, my favourite things. I could develop the plane and fly the plane, but I did not do enough to get bookings for the plane. If you share this tendency, I recommend reading Atomic Habits by James Clear. It will help you develop more productive habits that are less dependent on willpower, such as combining rewards with tasks you do not enjoy and using habit stacking.

Wishing you every success!



Emer O'Donnell

Founder of TeenReconnect – UK



On the entrepreneurial journey, I have learned the value of knowing that you don't need to have it all figured out, but you do need to know why you're doing it and what your destination looks like. So **be clear about what you want to create in the world** and why it matters to you.

Know who you are. Identify and play to your strengths, but also be honest about your blind spots. This is where stress and self-doubt can creep in.

Building self-awareness early helps you stay calm, focused, and resilient when things don't go to plan (and they often won't).

Things can also take much longer than you think. **Learn how your emotions work.** Know when they push you forward and when they hold you back. Surround yourself with honest, energizing people who want to build better. **Avoid the naysayers** who drain your energy or fuel your doubts.

Some mornings you won't feel motivated. That's normal. But if you're passionate about your mission, it will pull you forward. **Trust yourself.** Trust your dream. Get creative. Have fun and **know who you want to serve.** When you build something aligned with your passion that helps others, real magic happens.

Stay grounded in your values. They'll guide you when you feel lost or tempted to give up. Have people in your business who share those same values. Learn to communicate your vision clearly to others. When stuck, ask: What's the next obvious step? Then take it. You don't need the whole picture, just enough momentum to move forward.

Learn to fail fast and bounce back. Build meaningful relationships with a relevant network. It's a superpower for both giving and receiving support. Most importantly, believe you are enough, because if you don't, who will? **Courage is the antidote to fear.** If fear feels overwhelming, depersonalize the mission. Make it about those you're here to serve.

Everyone faces mental resistance. Learn how it works, manage it, and never compare your journey to someone else's. I've lived this. I built my business so others can discover and build their dreams, because they're worth building and deserve to come true.



Mark Allen

Founder & Chairman of Mark Allen Group – UK

The first bit of advice I would give to anyone starting out is this: **Do not chase money; let money chase you.** The point is simple. Do something you believe in with all the passion it requires. If you become good at something, success is likely to follow, and with it, money.

As an entrepreneur, you need to **back your own judgment rather than that of others.** It is a lonely journey, but it can be even lonelier having business partners who do not share your vision, which often leads to conflict and falling out. I do not regret for a second going it alone from the start.

The same applies to joint ventures: they often do not work out. **Trust yourself. And commit, commit, commit.** Hard work and consistency will always outperform natural but lazy talent. Be clear about what you want to do, and more importantly, why.

Mark Allen



Lloyd Thompson

Founder of VirtualDOO – Australia

1) **Find mentors and a community early:** Being a founder can feel lonely and the challenges can be endless. Having a mentor who has walked the path before helps you avoid costly detours. A community of peers is just as vital. Entrepreneurship is often portrayed as a solo sport, but in reality winning is a team effort. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

2) **Treat setbacks as data, not disasters:** Challenges and missteps are inevitable. The key is to pause and ask: What can I learn from this? and What action will prevent it next time? This shift, from reacting emotionally to responding with curiosity, has kept me from repeating the same mistakes and reminded me that every lesson is an improvement.

3) **Always be testing:** Early on I sometimes fell in love with an idea and overbuilt it, only to discover the market did not care. Other times, an idea I almost dismissed turned out to resonate. Now I let the data lead. I test a message or offer in a small way, a post, an ad, a conversation, and then watch the response. After that I iterate. It is not the repetitions that matter, it is the iterations.

VIRTUALDOO



Sanja Mitrovska

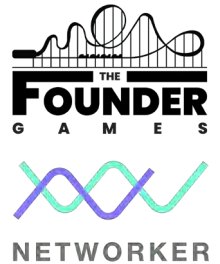
Founder of The Founder Games and Networker – North Macedonia

Treat entrepreneurship not as a straight road but as a living experiment. The biggest growth in my career did not come from carefully written plans or waiting until everything was “ready.” It came from testing ideas in real environments, with real people, and embracing the discomfort of uncertainty.

When I started The Founder Games, many people told me that mixing reality TV with a startup accelerator was impossible, too unconventional, or too ambitious for this region. Instead of shrinking the idea, I chose to test it. We launched a pilot in a country of just 2 million people, backed by one of the biggest banks. Then we expanded into 15 countries, from Poland to Turkey. Within weeks, more than 200 startups applied. Forty became part of our program, an accelerator broadcast live, and together we created a 6M€ investment pipeline for them. And the show itself? It is now on its way to the Cannes Festival, where we will present it to partners across LATAM, the Middle East, and beyond. What once looked impossible became real, simply because we dared to try.

That journey taught me two things. First, **founders grow most when they are under pressure.** Real learning does not happen in a lecture or a deck, it happens when you are pushed beyond your comfort zone and forced to decide with limited time and information. Second, **resilience is a muscle.** Every rejection, failed pitch, or setback is training. If you embrace those moments, they shape you into the kind of founder who can handle bigger opportunities.

So my advice is this: **Do not try to avoid mistakes, try to accelerate them.** The faster you test, the faster you learn. Surround yourself with mentors, peers, and even critics who push you further, because comfort zones do not produce breakthroughs. And above all, remember that the journey itself is the reward. You are not just building a startup. You are building yourself.





Eirik Sandøy Aa

Co-Founder of Nimmo and Nivero – Norway

nimmo
nivero

I would remind myself that entrepreneurship is not about control, it is about direction. You cannot plan every step, but you can **stay true to your values, your people, and your purpose.**

When I left a stable career in oil and gas to start Nivero, I did not have all the answers. What I did have was a growing conviction that technology should serve people and the planet, not just profit. That thought turned into action and eventually into two ventures: Nivero, helping others build sustainable digital solutions, and Nimmo, improving shared transport for families and communities.

If I were starting again, I would tell myself this:

- 1) **Purpose first:** Every idea is fragile at the beginning. Anchor it in something real and meaningful.
- 2) **Partnership matters:** Having a co-founder means balance. You need someone who shares your values, challenges your assumptions, and helps carry the weight when things get tough.
- 3) **Progress rarely feels like progress:** You will question yourself often, but growth happens quietly in the background through consistency.
- 4) **Health is part of the equation:** Listen to your body as much as you listen to your business. Sustainability starts with you.
- 5) **Family is your true foundation:** Their support gives your purpose meaning and your work direction.

Looking back, I would remind myself that success is not measured by scale or speed but by integrity, by building something useful, human, and kind. If my children one day look at what we have built and feel proud not because it is big but because it is honest and sustainable, then I will know I did it right.



Judit Tóth

Founder of Vivere Hospitality and INK Hotel – UAE

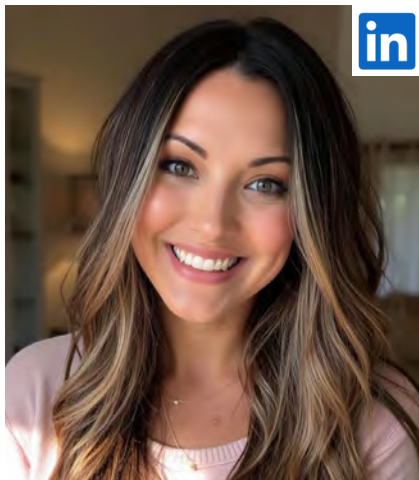


Throughout my journey as an entrepreneur and hospitality leader, the most impactful advice I have received, and often give, is this: **Run your business like you run your life**, with clarity, intuition, and unapologetic alignment to your values.

When I founded Vivere Hospitality and developed the INK Hotel brand in Dubai, I was not just building a business. I was building something that reflected my vision of what hospitality should feel like: bold, honest, experience-driven, and rooted in purpose. That meant navigating challenges without diluting the essence of the brand, staying independent in thought, and pushing through when easier paths were available but did not align with my long-term goals.

Stay true to yourself. Even when the market pushes you in different directions, and even when others do not yet see your vision, hold the line. Long-term success is built on consistent, values-driven choices.

Leadership is not about doing everything. It is about doing what matters most, with consistency and integrity. In a world driven by noise and trends, the most powerful strategy is **to know who you are and stay the course.**



Jasmine Seliga

CEO & Founder of Affixify – USA



Hold onto that naive enthusiasm, drive, and excitement for as long as possible. As you grow in your entrepreneurial journey, you'll face plenty of reality checks. People will remind you how hard it is, how far profitability might feel, and you'll hear every discouraging statistic ("Did you know only 1% of startups make it?"). There will be days when that spark starts to fade. But that's when you have to dig in, keep your head down, and remember those early moments of pure belief when you said, "We can do this." Then show up every single day. Keep putting in the work. **Never, ever stop being consistent.** Have the audacity to keep going even when the world tells you otherwise.



Joe Seddon

Founder & CEO of Zero Gravity – UK



If there is one bit of advice that has shaped my journey more than anything else, it is this: **Do not wait for things to be perfect.** Just start, and keep going, even when it is messy. When I launched Zero Gravity from my bedroom with £200, there was no grand plan. Only a belief that talent should meet opportunity and a willingness to figure it out as I went. I learned quickly that success is not about being the best straight away. It is about showing up, sticking with it, and being comfortable with chaos while you work through the challenges.

In the early days of your career, **take every chance you get.** At the start, options and luck are intertwined, and exposure to more opportunities increases your odds of finding the right fit. Ask for advice constantly. It is not weakness; it is how you learn, grow, and build momentum. People want to back people who are going somewhere. Your network of friends, mentors, and peers is worth more than any qualification. Look after it.

You are your own brand in the early days. People support people, not just ideas. **Be real about your mission and clear on your why.** That is what keeps you steady when things go sideways, and they will. You will screw things up, feel out of your depth, and question yourself. That is all part of it. Do not let it stop you.



Júlia Franch Benavides

Founder & CEO of Destino Dubai | Co-Founder of By Eleven Creative – UAE



I'd remind myself that running two businesses will be stressful. **It can be overwhelming.** There will always be something left to do; the list never ends. But that's okay. That's part of building something that matters.

Learn to set boundaries. Learn to stop, breathe, and protect the parts of you that make it all worth it. Keep doing the things that make you feel good, not just the things that make the business grow.

Don't forget about your family, your friends, your health. Keep training for that marathon, keep moving, **keep living outside of work.**

Don't be so hard on yourself. Don't demand from yourself what you'd never demand from anyone else. You're learning. You're growing. That's enough.

And please, **enjoy the process.** Because sometimes, incredible things will happen. Allow yourself to feel proud, to celebrate every win, no matter how small. We often forget to pause, to enjoy what we've built, to see how far we've come. From the inside, it can all feel blurry, but trust me, you're doing better than you think. So take a breath, celebrate your journey, and never take any of it for granted.

Grateful to my co-founders for helping me see this, for reminding me to slow down, **appreciate the little things, and enjoy the ride.**



Anatoly Zimin

Founder & CEO of GreenMesh – Slovenia



Do not try to do everything alone. Delegation is not a weakness, it is what allows you to build something that outlives your own energy. It took me years to understand that great founders do not just create products, they create people who can make decisions without them.

If you are raising investment for your project, pay attention to who gives you the money, not how much. You will be working with these people for a long time, and their mindset will influence every decision that follows. **The right investor can accelerate your vision, while the wrong one can quietly damage it.**

Everyone will have an opinion on how you should live: work less, travel more, exercise daily, meditate. These are all fine, but no one knows your situation better than you. **There is no universal formula for balance.** Sometimes long hours are exactly what is needed, and sometimes rest is the smartest move.

Listen to yourself first. Choose a few people you truly trust, those who know your character and your goals, and seek advice from them, not from random "successful" voices online.

If I had followed that earlier, I would have made fewer compromises, delegated faster, chosen partners more carefully, and probably reached clarity sooner. The best advice I can give to my younger self is simple: **Trust your own judgment, but build a team strong enough that you do not have to use it alone.**



Katja Verderber

Founder of italk.live method – Slovenia

italk.live

If I could begin again, I'd gently remind myself to stop doubting what I'm capable of. That voice of hesitation was never really mine, just borrowed fear. I've come to learn that our **deepest responsibility is to our own truth**. Each time I placed others' voices above my own, I lost sight of what truly mattered.

The most quietly dangerous thought is "I would like to... but." That small word has silenced more dreams than failure ever could. What I now teach is what I had to learn: **Self-trust comes before confidence, and purpose leads the way.**

If I were to start again, I'd **choose to be surrounded by people who build from love, not just for gain**. I'd work as if I were on a mission, because I was. And I still am.

You already carry what you need. Your voice is enough. Let fear pass through, but never let it lead.



Eleonora Srugo

Founder of Eleonora Srugo Team | Real Estate Broker at Douglas Elliman – USA

THE
ELEONORA & CO. TEAM
AT DOUGLAS ELLIMAN REAL ESTATE

If I could give advice to my younger self, I would still say to **take the leap of faith, but to do it with more intention**. To stop chasing dead ends, to protect your time, and to take care of your whole self, not just the fighter in you. Remember that the right clients will always value the person behind the professional.

Do not be afraid, and buy more real estate when the right opportunities appear. **Learn from your mistakes and do not repeat them.** Believe in people, but remember that no one will ever work harder for you than you will for yourself. And if you know deep down that you are a leader, do not dim your light by trying to fit into teams or partnerships that were never meant to contain you. Finding success the first time can feel effortless, but it is the fall and the rebuild that reveal who you truly are.



Marko Ljupković

Co-Founder & CEO of TechMe – Serbia

TechMe

If there's one thing I've learned after years in business development, startups, and mentoring, it's that you can plan every detail, but **life will always find a way to test you.**

I used to think success meant closing big deals and hitting targets. And sure, that's a great feeling. I lived for that adrenaline. But over time, I realized **it's not just about numbers or results.** It's about why you're doing it and the people who walk that road with you.

My "why" has always been people and family. Helping them grow, connect, and believe they can do more, whether that's a client, a teammate, or a startup founder. Every time someone succeeds because of something we built together, that feeling lasts longer than any deal I've ever signed.

Now, as I'm getting ready to become a father of twins (yes, twins!), I see how much life and business have in common. Both take preparation, teamwork, late nights, and a lot of patience. **You can't rush it,** but you can show up every day and give your best.

So my advice? **Lead with purpose. Stay human. Don't rush the process, and ask many questions.**

Success, like parenting, isn't about control. It's about presence, love, and the courage to keep showing up, even when things get messy. Because **if you can smile through the chaos, you're already winning.**



Jasmine Navarro

Founder & Family and Educational Wellbeing Expert of Nava Wellbeing – UAE



If I could go back and give myself advice at the start of my journey, I'd say this: **Slow down, notice, and trust yourself.** I know now that much of life's pressure comes from feeling like we have to have it all figured out, the perfect career, the perfect relationships, the perfect version of ourselves. But growth doesn't happen in perfection; it happens in presence, reflection, and the willingness to try, fail, and try again.

Listen more to your inner voice and less to external expectations. To invest in relationships that feel supportive rather than trying to please everyone. To make health, rest, and emotional well-being non-negotiable, because without those, nothing else can truly grow or move forward.

Financial decisions? Be patient, be thoughtful, and don't chase what looks impressive, **chase what feels aligned with your values.** Career choices? Follow curiosity and meaning, not just titles or prestige. And above all, remember that confidence and resilience are built step by step, not overnight.

I'd remind myself that being present, kind, and compassionate to others and to myself creates far more impact than any achievement. The moments when I **show up fully, even when it feels uncomfortable or uncertain,** are the moments that shape my growth the most.

Finally, I'd tell myself **it's okay not to have it all figured out.** Life is a journey, not a checklist. Trust your pace, trust your process, and trust that each small choice, each small act of presence, builds the life you're meant to live.



Tomas Gutierrez

Co-Founder & CFO of Nideport – Argentina



I would advise myself to do it the same way: **Follow your purpose, enjoy the process, learn from your mistakes, and turn problems into challenges.** Stay true to your values; act with honesty, fairness, and common sense. In the long run, integrity compounds and simplifies even the most complex problems.

You don't need to have all the answers from day one. What matters is your ability to learn fast, stay curious, and surround yourself with people smarter than you in different areas. Listen more than you talk. Ask better questions. And remember: **The best progress is compounded.** Great achievements are simply the result of doing what needs to be done every single day, patiently and consistently, until the big milestones arrive.

A simple example: if you walk investors through all the risks upfront, you won't face surprises when those risks eventually materialize. **Transparency builds trust.** Most problems are small when isolated, but they grow exponentially when stacked, like a snowball rolling downhill. That's why it's critical to address them early, not accumulate them, delay them, or hide them. Communicate sincerely, be consistent, and align expectations with all stakeholders.

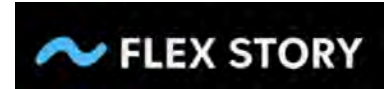
And don't forget: the uncomfortable conversations you avoid today become the crises you face tomorrow. **Courage compounds just as much as integrity.**

Finally, acting with goodness is not only a moral choice, it is a strategic one. Dishonesty, manipulation, and shortcuts create hidden debt that drains energy, attention, and reputation. The truth requires no maintenance. Lies demand constant resources to sustain them, and over time, that burden becomes exponentially inefficient. **Opt for clarity, fairness, and transparency.** They free mental bandwidth, attract the right people, and build momentum that compounds in your favor.



Kelly Blakeley

Founder of Flex Story – UAE



Be curious. **Recognise that it's a learning journey.** Curiosity is a superpower; it opens doors you didn't know existed and keeps you learning long after the startup phase. Enjoy the freedom this journey brings. Speak to different, interesting people.

Self-belief is not optional. **You are the engine of your business.** Make sure it can run consistently. That means looking after your health as much as you can, building sustainable habits, and protecting your energy as carefully as your finances.

There will be skills you don't yet have, but you can learn them. Entrepreneurship has a way of stretching you in every direction, and that's where the real growth happens.

Find your people. Connect with experienced entrepreneurs who understand the realities behind the highlight reels and learn from them. Listen to advice and **be selective about what will work for you** on your path.

Have a big vision, but **stay grateful for the small wins.** Momentum is built through a continued perspective. Entrepreneurship is rarely a straight line; it's a mix of courage, resilience, and continuous adjustment.

And above all, **be more you.** You built this vision. Authenticity builds genuine connection, and it's the fuel of the entrepreneurial fire that keeps you moving forward even when things get hard.



Marco Janezic

Founder of Blue Ribbon Partners – Germany



If I could go back and advise my younger self at the start of this journey, I'd emphasize three core principles that can make or break a venture.

- 1) **Focus:** In the beginning, every opportunity looks like the opportunity. The pull to chase every “shiny object” is immense, and it feels productive to say yes. I'd tell myself to be ruthless in defining the core mission and to say no to everything else, no matter how tempting. True progress doesn't come from doing ten things at 10% capacity; it comes from doing one or two things at 100%. This relentless focus is your greatest competitive advantage. It conserves your most precious resources: time, energy, and capital, and directs them where they will have the most impact.
- 2) **Choose the best partners, not the most convenient ones:** This applies to everyone: co-founders, early investors, key employees, and even first customers. It's easy to partner with people you already know or who are readily available. It's much harder to wait for the right partner, the one who truly shares your vision, complements your weaknesses, challenges your assumptions, and operates with the same non-negotiable values. A convenient but misaligned partner will cost you a hundred times more in the long run than the upfront effort it takes to find the right one. Be patient. Your core team is your foundation; don't build it on shaky ground.
- 3) **Asking for advice is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength:** My early entrepreneurial ego made me believe I had to have all the answers and that asking for help meant I wasn't cut out for the job. That is a dangerous trap. I'd tell myself to proactively seek out experienced entrepreneurs who have already navigated the storms I'm just sailing into. Asking for help doesn't mean defeat; it means acceleration. You are tapping into decades of lived experience. Find mentors. Build a personal board of directors. Be vulnerable, be curious, and listen. You don't have to make all the mistakes yourself; that is the most inefficient way to learn.



Petra Marinko

Founder of Non Tox Uni Kum – Slovenia

NONTOXUNIKUM

If I could start my journey again, knowing what I know today, I would simply say to myself: Go and follow your heart.

Everything else will find its place. I would trust intuition more than fear, passion more than plans. I would not rush to fit into existing systems but dare to build my own, slowly, authentically, with purpose. I would remind myself that the most meaningful growth comes from alignment, not ambition. That mistakes are teachers and realignments, not failures. That rest is part of progress. And that beauty, honesty, and kindness are not weaknesses in business, they are its true foundations. Above all, I would whisper again and again: **Go and follow your heart, it already knows the way.**



Zsolt Farkas

Founder of Evolut Agency – Hungary

EVOLUT

Focus on one thing, master it, and guard your attention fiercely. The entrepreneurial world is full of distractions, with shiny new trends, tools, business models, and platforms, but chasing all of them leads to average results.

What truly moves the needle is deep work over time on one core skill, service, or product. When you commit to doing one thing exceptionally well, day after day, even if the progress feels minimal, it compounds. **Small wins stack up**, and over three to five years, the gap between you and your competitors who lacked that same focus becomes enormous. Looking back, every breakthrough came not from switching directions but from doubling down.

When you're learning, **aim for T-shaped knowledge**: know a little about a lot, but go deep in one area. When you're working, double down on your niche and make it your domain of mastery.

So if you're starting out, **don't try to do everything**. Don't compare yourself to others on a different path. Pick your thing. Commit to it. Show up every day. That's how you build something that lasts.



Matic Kadliček

Founder & CEO of Video Center – Slovenia



- 1) **Never mind the flashy slogans:** While these may be well-intentioned, for all practical purposes in real life they tend to be oversimplified and lack nuance to be followed blindly. However, there are a precious few you will stumble upon and should keep in your memory that will keep you going.
- 2) **Seek out high-quality knowledge:** Be selective and filter out bad or "popular" sources to get to the good stuff. It is uniquely rewarding to go in depth with a topic you're interested in, even if only for its own sake or for a short period of time. After that, do try to put one to three things you've learned into practice. Don't overwhelm yourself. Or, as one of my coaches liked to say, "You know... You can't burn out if you don't overestimate yourself."
- 3) **Find good mentors or coaches:** The plural here is intentional. People who are more knowledgeable and experienced than you will cross your path, so pay attention. Ask them for advice and engage with them, either as a formal mentoring or coaching relationship or, as is even more often the case, be on the lookout, as the best advice is usually situational and comes from very unexpected sources, just when you need it most.
- 4) **Ask for feedback:** Be open to input on how others see you and your situation without getting too defensive. None of us are right all the time. Also, keep in mind that you do have the option of ignoring feedback that is discouraging or just plain wrong, however, don't do this too often.
- 5) **Give feedback:** For the other side of the dynamic, learn to give feedback to help others grow. Our knowledge, skills, and well-intentioned opinions also need to be communicated properly to have the desired impact. Incidentally, this is also why our ability to give feedback explains a large part of our business and overall life success.
- 6) **Expect the unexpected:** People and situations will cross your path, both good and bad. The good ones are a pleasant experience and give memories worth revisiting. The bad ones teach valuable lessons on what not to repeat. That being said, still don't forget to...
- 7) **Relax and have fun!** Find or invent fun ways to work, learn, and connect with others. By being your genuine, fun, and fallible self, you put everyone at ease to do the same. Anything else would be inauthentic, and you serve as a model of what work and life can be.

In the grander scheme of things, we do indeed seem to be here for each other. So **find ways to connect with people in your life** in a way that is helpful for everyone involved. Be of service, but don't forget to be of service to yourself either. This isn't always possible, since outcomes can be unpredictable sometimes, but don't let that dishearten you from trying.

Whatever you decide to go after, go after it wholeheartedly. There will be times when things get rough. However, those of you who will not be stopped by this fact will be the ones who get to shape your and many other people's futures. One final note to **keep yourself in check for either overestimating or underestimating yourself** in relation to others, a good Italian proverb about chess goes: "At the end of the game, the king and the pawn go back in the same box." May it serve as a good reminder to you as it does for me.



Azra Kacapor Nurkic

Co-Founder & CEO of Institute for Development Impact (I4DI) – USA



When I first started out, what drove me was conviction in the work itself. I have always believed that **better data and stronger evidence systems can make sustainable development more inclusive, resilient, and effective**. I set out to build a company that could pair rigorous strategy work with hands-on implementation so that analysis would translate into decisions and measurable results. We also understood that tools were becoming essential to how the field learned and operated, so we invested in building internal capacity to develop systems that could help our partners learn faster and deliver better. In those early years, I often judged progress by how much stronger our advisory work became, how much smarter and more integrated our systems grew, and how effectively both came together to strengthen evidence and performance.

Over time, I realized that **conviction and capability will take you far, but only if they are matched with clarity of purpose**. We built systems that performed exceptionally well and genuinely advanced our technical work, yet we hadn't defined what role they were meant to play in the larger business model. Were they part of our service offer, or were they products that should stand on their own? We kept investing, improving, and learning, but without a clear destination, we couldn't bring them to market or recover what we had put in. The value was there, but it stayed tied to our delivery instead of becoming something that others could use and build upon. I learned, sometimes the hard way, that innovation creates real impact only when intent, design, and market logic move together. A strong idea needs more than technical excellence. It needs a route to adoption, a reason for investment, and a structure that allows it to live beyond the organization that built it.

If I were starting again, I would still build with the same conviction, but I would **connect experimentation to a clearer strategy for value creation**. In a mission-driven organization, you have to ask early who the work is for, how it will grow, and what kind of return, financial or social, will make it worth sustaining. Otherwise, even the best ideas risk circling inside their own ambition instead of expanding their impact.



Mauricio Schöler

Founder & Chief Vision Officer of Schulering – Czechia

schulering:

Use your early years to travel, get to know new cultures, and respect them. Make friends from all over the world. Work hard while you have energy. Every seed that you plant will grow into an important relationship in your later years.

Learn how to sell. Building relationships is the first step; the second is to learn how to get out of the comfort zone of friendship and sell without selling.

Learn how to teach. Teaching is the most important skill you will carry through your life. It's important in business, in life, and as parents. The structure of teaching is similar in every scenario.

Work-life balance does not exist. The only thing that exists is your passion for what you do. When you work for yourself, it takes a lifetime to enjoy balance. If it is entrepreneurship that you seek, be prepared to have your mind on your business every minute of the day.

Relationships. When you find one, talk about the hard stuff before marriage: how you see children's education, and what is right and wrong in parenthood. Raising a family is the most rewarding activity you will have if you are both on the same page. Otherwise, conflicting ideas will drain your energy.

Build things that you care about, that will make a positive impact on people's lives. Be proud of your achievements and take the time to look back at what you have built, even if you haven't called it a success yet. Business life is not easy, and it doesn't get any easier as it goes.



Yasmin Hussain

Founder of YH Studios | The Lipstick Makeup Institute | Cancer Angels of Dubai – UAE

YH STUDIOS
PHOTOGRAPHY & FILM
THE LIPSTICK
MAKEUP INSTITUTE



When I started, I kind of went into it blind, not knowing the system, so if I were starting again, I would definitely **do more research**. There are so many groups you can join on Facebook that are full of advice and people who are genuinely willing to help, so I would absolutely take advantage of that.

I have learned to **believe in the power of preparation and patience**. Starting a business, especially in a new country, takes time. Every step, mistake, and long day becomes a lesson that builds both confidence and skill. Looking back, I see how important it is to ask questions, reach out, and keep learning from those who have already walked the path you are on.

Staying true to your vision matters more than anything. When I founded YH Studios, The Lipstick Makeup Institute, and later The Hair Angels UAE, there was no roadmap. What I did have was passion, determination, and a belief that hard work combined with honesty and care would lead to success. That mindset carried me through even the toughest moments.

Resilience is everything. There will be times when things feel impossible or when self-doubt creeps in, but those are the moments that define you. They shape your strength, sharpen your focus, and prove that perseverance matters far more than perfection.

If I could share one message with my younger self, it would be this: **Stay open, stay curious, and keep showing up.** Every challenge will pass, every failure will teach you something valuable, and every small victory will bring you closer to your dream. Be proud of every step, and trust that in time, everything will align.



Stefan Tofilović

Founder & CEO of DataDrill – Serbia



If I could speak to my younger self at the beginning of my entrepreneurial journey, I would say this: **Build slowly, but build with intention.** Don't chase every opportunity that looks shiny from a distance; clarity is more valuable than speed. Early on, I thought success meant saying yes to everything. Now I know that focus is the foundation of growth. Choose a direction you genuinely believe in and commit to becoming exceptional at it.

You will face uncertainty and doubt, and that's normal. What matters most is not avoiding failure but learning how to extract lessons from it faster than others do. **Surround yourself with people smarter than you** and give them space to think, create, and challenge you. Leadership is more about listening than instructing.

Take care of your energy, because in entrepreneurship, you are both the engine and the compass. Protect your curiosity; it's your most renewable source of strength. And never forget that **relationships are worth more than transactions.** Trust compounds over time in a way that no marketing budget ever can.

If I were starting again, I'd remind myself that **the goal is not just to build a company that grows but one that endures**, with principles that remain steady even when everything else changes.



Melissa McDermott

Founder & CEO of Reclaim – Spain

2eclaim.

If I could start my journey again, I'd tell myself to **stop waiting for everything to be perfect**. Progress always matters more than perfection. The longer you wait to make a move, the harder it becomes to move at all. Most of what holds us back isn't lack of skill; it's paralysis through analysis. You only learn when you act, and if it doesn't work, you simply move forward wiser.

I've learned that **the greatest ROI comes from people**. When you invest in the right relationships, you get exponential returns not only in outcomes but in growth. You can't build anything meaningful alone, and the time and energy you dedicate to communication and trust always pay back. Not every collaboration will work, and that's okay. Each step, even the imperfect ones, builds momentum and clarity.

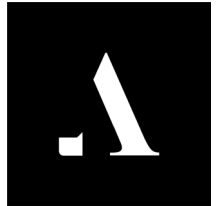
Work-life balance, for me, means finding purpose in what you do. When your work aligns with your values, energy replaces effort. The goal isn't to work endlessly, but **to create something that gives back as much as it takes**.

I'd remind myself that nothing is ever perfect, but every step counts. Keep going, stay honest with yourself and your team, and **focus on people**. That's where the real value lies.



Alex Ayin

Founder of Alex Ayin Advisory – UK



You don't rise to the occasion, you fall to your level of preparation. Whether it's a big meeting, an event, or a crisis, you don't suddenly "step up." You just show what you've practiced. So now I try to treat normal days like training for the big ones. It keeps me sharp.

Will it make the boat go faster? Ambition is great, but it's easy to end up chasing someone else's version of success. Before you speed up, **make sure you're still heading somewhere that matters to you.**

Energy management > time management! I used to think that if I could just squeeze more into my day, wake up earlier, plan tighter, and be more "efficient," then I'd be more successful. But I came to realize that you can have the same 12 hours as someone else, yet how you show up in those hours changes everything. I've had days where I worked three hours in deep focus and achieved more than in a week of running on fumes. Now I manage my energy like an athlete manages recovery.

Here's what that looks like in real life:

- 1) **Protect the first 90 minutes of the day:** No phone. No chaos. Just get one meaningful thing done. That small win sets the tone and builds momentum.
- 2) **Match the task to the energy:** High-energy mornings are for strategy, creativity, and decisions. Afternoons are for admin or recovery. Evenings: family, movement, stillness. When I stopped forcing productivity at low-energy times, my output went through the roof.
- 3) **Rest is part of the game:** Athletes don't "earn" recovery, they plan for it. Sleep, walks, and time off are where your next big idea brews. The moments you think you're "doing nothing" are usually when everything starts clicking.
- 4) **Surround yourself with energy multipliers:** People, places, habits. Some drain you, some charge you. Be ruthless about who and what gets access to your energy.



Tina Eskridge

Founder & GTM Strategist of Hackrobat – USA

HACKROBAT

If there's one thing my journey has taught me, from leading billion-dollar brands to building my own, it's that growth isn't a straight line. It's an experiment. It's messy, humbling, but wildly worth it when you learn to play the long game.

Early on, I thought the goal was velocity: bigger titles, bigger teams, bigger wins. But over time, I realized the real goal wasn't speed, it was alignment. The work that truly changes you, and others, happens when your purpose, your skills, and your energy all move in the same direction. That's when momentum becomes magnetic.

Here's what I'd tell any entrepreneur who's just getting started:

- 1) **Don't build a ladder, build a portfolio:** Collect experiences that stretch you sideways, not just upward. Every lesson compounds, even the ones that don't pay off immediately.
- 2) **Your network is your net worth, but your reputation is your currency:** Protect it. Lead with generosity, even when it's inconvenient. People remember how you made them feel long after they forget your pitch.
- 3) **Guard your energy like capital:** Burnout is not a badge of honor. Clarity comes from rest as much as from hustle. I allowed myself to burn out, and it resulted in a major health crisis. The lesson? Put yourself first and make time for recovery; your creativity depends on it.
- 4) **Confidence is fuel, but cash flow is oxygen:** Know your numbers, plan your runway, and keep control of your freedom to choose.

Every career pivot I've made, from Microsoft to Hackrobat to advising founders, came from one simple filter: does this move me closer to who I'm becoming?

The truth is, entrepreneurship will test everything, your patience, your boundaries, your ego. But if you can stay curious, stay kind, and stay close to your "why," the growth that follows won't just build your business. It will build a better version of you.



Juha Rytkönen

Co-Founder & CEO of ScanwAi – Finland



One of the most impactful pieces of advice I've ever received, and one that continues to guide my journey, is to **always stay curious and ready to learn new things**. No matter how much experience or expertise we accumulate, the world keeps changing faster than ever. The willingness to learn, adapt, and explore beyond one's comfort zone has shaped my career decisions and personal growth more than any other factor.

I've learned that **success doesn't come from knowing everything**; it comes from the courage to try, to experiment, and to fail forward. Every failure has been a lesson, every setback an opportunity to refine my thinking and approach. Trying again, smarter and more resilient each time, has been a key ingredient in building both my companies and my own leadership philosophy.

Another equally powerful principle is kindness and genuine networking. **Being nice is often underestimated in business**, yet it's one of the strongest assets a person can have. Building authentic relationships, helping others without expecting something in return, and treating people with respect have opened more doors for me than any formal strategy or business plan ever could.

Combining these ideas of lifelong learning, persistence through failure, and kindness has helped me stay grounded while pursuing ambitious goals. Whether leading teams, developing new AI-driven solutions, or building international partnerships, I try to keep these simple but powerful principles at the core of everything I do.



Kristina Talova

Co-Founder of SheAI – Spain



If I could start again, I would tell myself this: **Stop doubting, start daring.** You will never regret a failure as much as the chances you did not take. You will lose some battles, but every stumble will make you stronger, braver, and wiser.

And as a woman, I would remind myself that entrepreneurship is not just for “them.” It is for us too. Even when it feels like we are outsiders, like we need to be tougher, louder, less emotional, we do not. We are not less. **We are capable, powerful, and deserving.** You can build, lead, and inspire.

Learn people. Learn to listen. Learn to read the room. Learn to let go. Not every relationship will last, and that is okay. Tell your story well. Show up fully. **Be bold, even when your voice shakes.**

Take the risk. Say the thing. Make the mistake. And never, ever think less of yourself. **You are not here to be perfect. You are here to grow.**



Stephany Oliveros

Co-Founder of SheAI – Spain



If I were to start my journey again, armed with everything I know now, I would tell myself **to embrace curiosity and not shy away from diverse interests.** My experiences, from psychology to AI research, unexpectedly led me to entrepreneurship and gave me a unique approach to problem-solving. **Do not be afraid to forge your own path;** genuine passion will attract the right opportunities and people.

Prioritize activities that energize you, because financial success often follows. Invest in supportive relationships, build financial discipline by saving and investing, and stay connected with nature. Maintain both physical and mental well-being through sports. I personally enjoy martial arts and yoga. **Set clear goals, celebrate your achievements, and make sure the journey includes fun and fulfillment.**



Maja Završnik

Co-Founder & CMO of SheAI – Spain



People often say to specialise or niche down. But that mould does not fit us all, especially those of us with diverse interests and passions. I believe that **success comes from curiosity and a willingness to try and learn new things.**

I learned photography and website building because I was curious about travel blogging, which led to a job where I was able to do both while also learning about entrepreneurship, something I always wanted to pursue. Today, my wide range of experiences provides me with a well-rounded view and a creative approach to problem-solving.

Be fearless in the pursuit of what drives you. When you follow your values and passion, you find people and opportunities you have been craving. Do not simply bend to society's expectations, and do not just take the first job you can get. In today's capitalistic society with an infinite demand for production, burnout is far too common. Instead, invest your time in things that give you energy and put a smile on your face, and the money will follow.

Finally, **surround yourself with good people who care about your wellbeing and give back to others.** Aim to save and invest 20% of your salary, visit nature regularly, and find a sport you enjoy that keeps your mind sharp and your body strong. Have a vision for your life, set goals, and celebrate milestones. You deserve fun, happiness, and fulfilment.



George Karani

Founder of frontforumfocus – Kenya



Be relentlessly curious, build great relationships, start projects early, and stay ambitious yet humble. If you do that, and keep learning, you will end up somewhere better than you dreamed, even if the map looks different than you expected.

As I look back from where I am now, there are a few things I would tell you, not to change the path but to prepare you for the adventure ahead. **The path is not a straight line, but the map is simple.** Stay insatiably curious, that is your superpower. Curiosity will lead you to opportunities others miss because they are too busy following a checklist. Trust your instinct to ask the questions no one else does.

This mindset will also lead you to the right people. **Choose your circle with intention,** because your direction in life follows the company you keep. Surround yourself with those who are smarter and more driven than you, they will be your greatest teachers.

Do not wait for permission. Start projects before you feel ready. Every meaningful skill and breakthrough comes from working on something real, even when it is messy. Action is the best teacher, and this is how you will build your legacy.

Be ambitious, but stay grounded. **Dream big, but anchor your growth in daily habits:** read widely, learn constantly, and protect your health. The ability to learn, unlearn, and try again will take you further than any job title ever could.

Go build. **The world needs your messy, brilliant action.** The map will look different than you expect, but the destination will be better than you ever dreamed.



Angela Soudi

Co-Founder of Junior Gladiator Kidpreneurs – UAE



My advice to others is simple: **Build a life that feels good on the inside**, not just one that looks good on the outside. So many of us get caught up in chasing goals, juggling responsibilities, and trying to meet everyone's expectations that we forget to pause and ask, "What truly matters to me?"

The biggest lesson I have learned is that **you cannot pour from an empty cup**. Prioritising self-care is not selfish; it is essential. When you take care of your mind, body, and emotional well-being, you show up as your best self for your work, your family, and your purpose. Whether it is setting boundaries, exercising, meditating, or simply taking quiet time for yourself, self-care allows you to function at your highest level and handle life's challenges with clarity and calm.

I also believe in having a deep love for learning and continuous growth. The world is changing faster than ever, and **staying curious keeps you adaptable, confident, and inspired**. Every new skill, experience, or perspective you gain expands what is possible for you both personally and professionally.

So my advice is this: **Keep evolving, stay curious, and never forget to look after yourself along the way**. Success is not about doing more; it is about being more aligned, more grounded, and more intentional with how you live and lead.



Rares-Cristian Bisag

Founder of Romanian Space Initiative (ROSPIN) – Romania



If I were starting again, I'd begin by choosing a mission so clear that saying yes becomes effortless, then dream bigger than I feel comfortable. **Pick one narrow problem, ship the smallest valuable version, and learn daily.** Pair ambition with a premortem mindset: assume what can go wrong will, and design Plans B and C upfront so momentum survives surprises.

I'd build the team like a puzzle, not a mirror. Recruit for complementary competencies, not clones of my strengths, while looking deeply for the same personal value system. Write the operating system early: a one-page strategy, a cadence calendar, and a decision log so new people can onboard in a day. **Treat trust as the core product.** Keep small promises obsessively, share updates before anyone asks, and celebrate learning speed. Never underestimate how much people need to be seen; recognition is free leverage. Applaud publicly, coach privately.

I'd **seek mentors who've walked the road and borrow their maps.** Don't reinvent the wheel when a better path exists. Sometimes you don't need a new wheel at all; you need tracks to cross the terrain. Ask for uncomfortable feedback, anchor debates in data, and keep curiosity louder than ego.

Know the unit economics from day one and tie every euro to a milestone that de-risks the next step. Start sponsor and partner updates months before you need capital. **Partnerships are instruments of execution, not press releases.** Communicate so much about what you're building that you feel repetitive, as that's usually when the outside world hears it for the first time.

Energy is IP. Sleep well, train your body, and block phone-free thinking time. When tired, simplify scope, not standards. **Enjoy the process deliberately:** journal and celebrate small wins, practice gratitude, and allow yourself to be proud even on days that end with honest fatigue.

Finally, **tell better stories with better numbers, outlining why this matters and how it's performing.** When things break, as they will, return to the why: people, society, the next generation. Build with humility, communicate with courage, and remember that not even the sky is the limit.



Sivagamie (Regina) Naicker

Founder of RegiNexus – South Africa



Throughout my career, powerful advice has often arrived quietly, between meetings, during late-night study sessions, after difficult conversations, and while raising three children alongside demanding responsibilities. Four lessons changed how and why I lead:

- 1) **Motherhood is not a career limitation:** Being a mother of three deepened my leadership. Parenting builds negotiation, prioritisation, empathy, and resilience, the same competencies required in supply chain. Motherhood sharpened my ability to lead people, not just processes.
- 2) **Your network is your strategic advantage:** Capability gets you into the room; connectivity keeps you relevant. Serving on the SAPICS Board and the UNISA Advisory Board expanded my influence, helped align education with industry needs, and enabled talent development across the continent. Networks are built through integrity, contribution, and alignment, not transaction.
- 3) **Support women without an agenda:** In male-dominated environments, scarcity can create silent competition. Women are not competing for one seat; we are expanding the table. Through the G20 EMPOWER Alliance and the G100 Female CEOs network, I have seen how collaboration accelerates access, entrepreneurship, and wealth creation. Recommend women, celebrate them, mentor generously, and call out subtle bias.
- 4) **Your voice is your value:** Silence protects comfort, not progress. Speaking up shapes policy, shifts bias, and reframes opportunity. Your experience may be someone else's missing answer. Voice is clarity, courage, and consistency.

These lessons are connected: motherhood teaches empathy, networks expand perspective, supporting women strengthens ecosystems, and voice drives transformation. Leadership is not position; it is impact. Success is collective, ambition needs boundaries, and leadership without legacy becomes noise.

My commitment is to ensure more women enter influential spaces confidently and unapologetically. **Grow where you are, but never stay where you have stopped growing.**



Aleksandar Ivanović

Co-Founder & CTO of ENON Solutions – Serbia



Looking back, I've learned that **success comes from turning a good idea into something that grows with stability and purpose.** Today, building a prototype or MVP is easier than ever. You can do it with almost no technical skills using no-code tools, AI assistants, and templates that let you get something functional up and running in weeks. That's great for validating ideas quickly and cheaply. The real challenge begins when you try to scale. A tool that works for ten users may collapse under a hundred. Security, performance, and maintainability soon become serious issues. That's when you need someone who truly understands systems architecture, such as a strong technical principal or a reliable outsourcing partner.

Too many startups waste months patching an MVP that was never built for growth. When you are serious about scaling, invest in someone who can design a proper foundation. It saves enormous time, stress, and money later. If you cannot hire a full-time technical lead, work with a senior contractor or an experienced agency. The key is competence and accountability, someone who can plan and execute, not just write code.

Grants can be helpful, and many early-stage startups rely on public funding or innovation programs to get started. We did too. They can be incredibly useful, giving you room to test ideas without immediate financial pressure. However, grants do not solve your business model, and they rarely arrive on time. Payments can be delayed for months while salaries, rent, and taxes still need to be paid. I've seen founders base their entire budget on promised funds, only to face a cash-flow crisis after one administrative delay.

Build a parallel source of revenue. Even small income from consulting, pilot projects, or early customers can keep you afloat. Your team depends on you to make payroll, so never rely solely on government timelines.



Zahra Habib Al Darwish

Founder & CEO of Royal Mood Event and ZHD Consultancy – UAE

If I could share one piece of advice that truly shaped my journey, it would be this: **Lead with purpose, not pressure.**

Throughout my path as a founder, author, and speaker, I discovered that real success doesn't come from constant hustle; it comes from clarity, alignment, and consistency. When you know why you're doing something, every challenge becomes a stepping stone, not a setback.

In the early stages of my career, I often tried to do everything, to please everyone, to prove my worth, to stay ahead. But the moment I paused and reconnected with my purpose, I found that opportunities started finding me instead.

My biggest growth came from learning balance: between work and rest, ambition and peace, giving and receiving. I believe that abundance starts in the mind, and when you trust your journey, things begin to unfold naturally.

Financial independence, emotional wellbeing, and self-belief are deeply connected. Manage your finances with wisdom, nurture your relationships with empathy, and never stop learning. The most powerful investment you can make is in yourself, your mindset, your education, and your ability to adapt.

And finally, remember this: **Success is not a destination; it is a reflection of who you become along the way.**





Jeremie Landweer

Founder of SociisGroup – Belgium



If I could speak to the younger version of myself, the one who still believed that vision alone was enough, I would say this: **Slow down, and feel it all.** You are not here to impress; you are here to embody.

In a world chasing speed and noise, authenticity is the rarest asset. Everyone will tell you to scale faster, be louder, keep going. But the truth is this: **Presence is not built in the spotlight, it is built in silence.** And the ones who last are not the ones who shouted, but the ones who stayed.

I have lost everything at some point, companies, money, trust, even myself. I have been broken in ways I never expected. But I rebuilt, not by pushing harder, but by getting honest. By redefining what it means to lead.

Today I lead SociisGroup™, a global trust-based placement system for leaders who want more than performance. We do not pitch transformation, we verify it. We guide people through The LIME Code™, the balance between Life and Time, and everything in between.

To anyone starting today, I would say this: **Build something that gives people their dignity back.** Let your company reflect your values, not your insecurity. And remember, when the world goes dark, what stays is not what you built, but who you became.

Because in the end, it is not about becoming someone impressive. It is about becoming someone true. **Be the person your future self would follow.** And if that person still stands with clarity and grace, you are on the right path.



Dimitri Vantorre

Founder of Quantum Collective – Belgium



- 1) **Stay True:** Slow down. Remember. You are not here to win the race; you are here to remember who you are while running it. You will be tempted to chase applause, to build what looks good on the outside while you are crumbling inside. Do not. Build from wholeness, not from hunger. From love, not from lack.
- 2) **Redefine Success:** Do not trade your presence for productivity. Your power is not in doing more; it is in knowing what not to do. You do not need to prove yourself. You need to reveal yourself. Trust that real success is not built by force, but by frequency and conscious intention. When you are deeply aligned, what is meant for you becomes inevitable.
- 3) **Choose Wisely:** Surround yourself with people who challenge your truth, not your confidence. And remember this: The business is not your legacy. Your way of being is.



Dušan Krstić

Founder & CEO of Nais Robotics – Serbia



Use your energy wisely. Don't waste it on things that are not important. Your energy is not infinite. It is meant to carry you all the way. And "all the way" means toward your goal. Your goal is what you set for yourself. Reaching one goal gives you the energy for the next one.

Don't be hard on yourself. When you make a mistake, reflect on it for a while without feeling bad. Learn the lesson and thank God for the privilege of being able to keep going. Keep going and be grateful for one more lesson learned.



Tricia Evans

Founder of Tricia Evans Business Coaching – UAE



Early in my career, a mentor told me, **“If you aim at nothing, you’ll hit nothing,”** and that advice has driven me ever since. As a result, my business tagline is **“Be Successful on Purpose,”** and that’s exactly what I help people do.

I keep a few reminders on my noticeboard to ensure that **everything I do is intentional:**

- 1) My life masterplan (this drives everything and includes how I want to make the most of every year, plus the legacy I want to leave)
- 2) Prioritise your health (without it, nothing else matters)
- 3) The gap between what you want and what you get is what you do
- 4) Your daily habits determine your future
- 5) Do something every day your future self will thank you for
- 6) Choose your tribe, and be mindful of what you eat, watch, listen to, and read
- 7) Spend time with people who grow, because the conversation is different
- 8) Use your gifts to serve the world and truly make a difference



Giovambattista Scuticchio Foderaro

Founder, Chairman, President & CEO of VR Group – Italy



VR CORPORATENEXT

I would advise **championing the vision of integrity and balance**. I would tell my younger self to dream audaciously, lead with values, stay grounded in curiosity, and walk boldly into the unknown, knowing that purpose, not just ambition, turns a life into a legacy, more than what I already did. To all those walls I met, go over them straight without hesitation.

Cultivate adaptability, stay open to new disciplines, and treat every experience as an opportunity to grow intellectually and emotionally. **Success does not come from playing it safe**. Act boldly but thoughtfully. Make courageous decisions even when outcomes are not guaranteed, and trust that a long-term vision will outweigh short-term uncertainty.

I recall the days of my youth, when uncertainty often stood as my most faithful companion. If I could return to that time, I would offer reflections shaped by both hesitation and purpose, so the path ahead could be navigated with greater clarity.

Each opportunity, even the most modest, is a threshold to the extraordinary, so **explore without fear**. I declined a few offers, believing them unworthy of my aspirations, only to realize, with time, that they were gateways to transformative experiences. **Do not be paralyzed by the prospect of failure**; in truth, every misstep is a fragment of the greater mosaic of wisdom. Had I embraced more of the seemingly minor chances, I would have cultivated a constellation of knowledge and human connection that today I deem priceless.

In matters of relationships and personal connections, it is not solely who you know, but how you nurture those bonds. Friendships and love alike are built not on circumstance, but on intention, listening, presence, and authenticity. **Do not allow trivial misunderstandings to calcify into silence**. Be transparent, more than I was. Be kind, be courageous in your vulnerability, and set a price to everything you do, even vulnerabilities have a value. If I had given more of myself in this regard, I might have found in others a sanctuary in life's most turbulent moments.

Be both strategic and principled. Learn the discipline of stewardship early. Every euro saved is not merely a number, but a step toward sovereignty. Do not postpone prudence in the hope of a higher income; begin where you are. Invest wisely, and do not wait for a better occasion to take risks. Above all, in myself, in my younger mind, and in the vision of who I was, this is where legacy is born.

Regarding personal growth, please **don't neglect your inner sanctum**. The harmony between labor and life is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Pursue passions that ignite the soul and make space for stillness. Success, in its truest form, is measured not by accolades but by the quiet joy that infuses your everyday existence.

Pause often, reflect deeply, and integrate what you learn into your life. **Your journey is singular, and each moment is an irreplaceable thread in the fabric of your narrative**. I would learn what I am today earlier than how it happened, and how I did. Embrace transformation, remain ever curious, and commit relentlessly to becoming and achieving what you want to be.



Rinawati Prihatiningsih

Co-Owner & President Commissioner of PT Infinitie Berkah Energi – Indonesia



My entrepreneurial journey has taught me that **success is not a straight road but a series of circles**. Each phase of life and business brings new challenges, lessons, and opportunities. I began in property services, and today I co-lead a women-owned clean energy logistics company in Indonesia. This shift was not accidental; it was born out of faith, perseverance, and focus.

Faith gave me the courage to step into new industries, trusting that purpose and values would guide me even when the destination was not clear. Perseverance has been my constant companion, because there are moments when doors close, contracts fall through, or policies change overnight. Instead of giving up, I learned to rise again, stronger and more prepared. Focus helped me channel energy into what truly matters: building integrity, nurturing relationships, and creating impact beyond profit.

Along the way, I realized that **entrepreneurship is not only about vision but also about discipline**. Sound financial management, from understanding cash flow to balancing risk, is the foundation that allows ideas to grow sustainably. Taking care of health is equally critical, because no business thrives if the leader is exhausted. And as a mother, wife, and entrepreneur, I discovered that work-life balance is not about perfect division, but about presence. It is about giving your full attention to the moment you are in, whether with your family, your team, or yourself.

Most importantly, I am passionate about making impact. Through my roles with IWAPI, G20 EMPOWER, and other platforms, I have witnessed how inclusivity transforms economies and communities. This is also why my business partner and I founded #SheMovesEnergy, an initiative dedicated to empowering women as drivers, mechanics, and leaders in the energy logistics value chain. By breaking stereotypes and opening new pathways, we not only strengthen our industry but also prove that sustainable growth must be inclusive.

So my advice is this: **Embrace transformation with courage, stay grounded in your values, and never lose sight of your purpose**. Build with integrity, rise with perseverance, walk with faith, and lead with inclusivity. True success is not only about what you achieve but also about the bridges you build for others to cross, because when we open pathways for more women and future entrepreneurs, our journey creates lasting impact that multiplies far beyond ourselves.



Henry Won

Founder of Clvir – Canada



When I was 18, I thought independence meant success. “I’ll figure it out on my own,” I said. And I thought the fastest way to learn business was to start one. Wrong. For the first year, I was burning time and money learning lessons I could have learned from someone else. In reality, I was just trading time for ego.

The truth is, **youth gives you time, not experience**. You have the capacity to fail, but you do not yet have the skill to make those failures count. After realizing this, I decided to work for a startup with about a dozen people, directly under the CEO. My role was to help him build his personal brand and create content for his audience. I was not getting paid much monetarily, but I was getting paid in something more valuable: perspective.

He would tear my drafts apart, line by line. He would explain why certain words mattered, why tone could make or break trust, and why clarity beats cleverness every single time. That kind of feedback does not exist on Google. It came from decades of experience, distilled into moments of mentorship.

After a year of that, I felt ready to try it myself. And this time, I was not starting from zero. I carried within me hundreds of lessons absorbed from watching someone who had already walked the path.

If you are young and itching to start your own business, do not. At least not yet. Instead, **work with someone who is doing what you want to do, prioritise learning over earning, and treat the job like a training ground, not a paycheck**.

It is like investing with a small portfolio. If you lose £100, you will live. But if that £100 teaches you how to make £10,000 later, that is a return worth the risk. You have time. You have energy. What you do not have yet are the scars, the instincts, and the pattern recognition that only come from doing the reps.

Spend your early years acquiring those skills before you stake your own chips on the table. In business, **the biggest wins go to those who prepared before they played**.



Tara Rose Kidd

Founder & Managing Director of Tara Rose Salon, Fratelli Barbershop and Tara Rose Academy – UAE

The best advice that has made the biggest impact on my journey is to **focus on balance in every part of life**. The 8 Pillars of Wellness taught me that real growth means caring for your whole self, not just one area.

The 8 Pillars of Wellness are:

- 1) **Physical Wellness:** Taking care of your body through movement, rest, and nutrition.
- 2) **Emotional Wellness:** Understanding your feelings and managing stress in healthy ways.
- 3) **Intellectual Wellness:** Keeping your mind active and open to learning.
- 4) **Social Wellness:** Building healthy and supportive relationships.
- 5) **Spiritual Wellness:** Connecting with your values and what gives your life meaning.
- 6) **Environmental Wellness:** Creating surroundings that support peace and focus.
- 7) **Financial Wellness:** Managing money wisely and planning for stability.
- 9) **Occupational Wellness:** Finding purpose and growth in your studies or work.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that **we are only as good as we think we are**. If you believe you can't do something, you're right, because your mindset shapes your actions. Growth starts when you begin to believe that you can. I also learned that everyone learns differently. We're not built the same way, and that's okay. Mistakes are part of the process, not the end of it.

Another important lesson is to **take advice only from people who have done what you want to do**. Everyone will have opinions at every step, but not all advice helps you move forward. Stay focused on your bigger vision, because things will get hard and you might want to give up.

Every three months, I take time to check in with myself. Am I on course? Am I still aligned with my goals and values? This keeps me grounded and reminds me why I started. When I care for all eight areas of wellness, stay mindful of my mindset, and keep learning through the ups and downs, I grow into the best version of myself, one small step at a time.





Braden Cobb

Founder of Kidz Economy – Singapore



If I could go back and give myself advice at the start of this journey, I'd begin with this: **Bet on yourself earlier.** For too long I waited for permission, thinking I needed to prove something before I could build something. The truth is, clarity and confidence only come after you step out. If you feel the pull, trust it. You won't feel ready, and that's okay.

I'd also tell myself to **be careful about who I let into my inner circle.** Relationships shape your mindset more than circumstances ever will. Choose people who energize you, who are honest but kind, and who dream big alongside you. Step back from those who weaken your belief in what's possible.

Another lesson is that how you handle your time and money shows what you value most. I once thought budgeting and planning were restrictive. Now I see them as tools for freedom. **Knowing where your time and money go lets you commit to what matters** and say no without guilt. It is also what makes it possible to build something that lasts.

On balance, I've learned it is less about dividing hours equally and more about being fully present where you are. There were seasons I gave everything to building something meaningful, but I've also learned to guard space for health, family, and joy without apology. **Burnout doesn't make you a better leader.** Rested, grounded, joyful people build better things.

Finally, I'd remind myself that **growth comes from feedback, not perfection.** You don't need to get it right the first time. Some of my best decisions and most important changes came from mistakes or hard conversations. Stay open, keep asking questions, and remember that progress doesn't need to be loud to be real.

If I had absorbed these lessons earlier, I would have saved myself stress and moved faster toward impact. But I am grateful for the slow lessons too. They are what make the story worth telling.



Zai Miztiq

Founder of Step Up Journey – UAE

STEP UP
journey

If I could sit across from my younger self at the starting line of this entrepreneurial journey, wide-eyed, hopeful, and terrified, I would take her hands, look her in the eyes, and say: **Start with soul, but don't forget the system.**

The journey of entrepreneurship is more than passion and hustle. It is about alignment: between your purpose, your people, your process, and your peace.

I would remind myself that **success is not found in endless action, but in intentional direction.** In the early days, I was driven by survival and significance. Now, I am powered by strategy and service. I have learned that **clarity beats chaos, and focus is more valuable than speed.** If I had embraced that earlier, I would have avoided burnout disguised as ambition.

On the personal front, I would whisper: **Do not sacrifice your health and relationships at the altar of your mission.** You can build empires and still make time to dance, to rest, to heal. Self-care is not a luxury; it is a leadership responsibility.

Financially, I would tell myself to **learn the language of money early:** how to multiply it, manage it, and make it meaningful. Money is a tool, not a trophy.

And finally, I would say: **Be kind to yourself in the becoming.** Growth is not linear. Doubt, rejection, and setbacks are part of the sacred curriculum. Build resilience, not resistance. The journey may be lonely at times, but your legacy will make the loneliness worth it.

Today, I coach leaders globally, and my advice remains the same: **Lead with soul, structure with wisdom, and never forget that your life is your message.**



Zeeshan Qedwae

Co-Founder of Studio A Collective – Pakistan | Managing Partner at Tech Comradery – USA



Putting yourself first is important. Don't waste your time or energy helping those who are not willing to change.

I have lived in seven cities across Asia and Europe and built my career in growth and founder roles. I made plenty of mistakes along the way. But my real turning point came at age 40, right in the middle of the COVID chaos. That was when I hit reset.

I learned that success is not just about numbers or hustle. It is about honoring your own needs, setting boundaries, and being firm with yourself. You can't pour from an empty cup. Compassion is important, but protecting your energy is critical. **Focus on those willing to grow, and let go of the rest.**

Mistakes do not define you. What matters is how you recalibrate, stay true to yourself, and lead with purpose. That is how you build real resilience and lasting impact.



Boris Kozlevčar

Founder & Managing Partner of JK LAW – Slovenia



Don't listen to those who say something can't be done. **Surround yourself with people who look for solutions, not excuses.**

Building success in a company is always a team effort. Set clear goals and communicate them so everyone understands and connects with them. Work with people who share your passion for achieving common objectives. Only then can ideas become reality.

Don't strive for perfection; **strive to do your best.** Be brave enough to make mistakes, as they are an essential part of learning. When you aim for perfection too early, you miss the lessons that truly shape your growth.



Kirsty Parker

Founder of KP Consulting Partners | Director at The Exit Foundry – UK



If I could give one piece of advice to the version of me at any stage of my journey, it would be this: Protect your leverage. By leverage, I mean your energy, your credibility, and your options.

- 1) **Career:** Choose roles that grow your range, not just your title. The biggest jumps in my career came from saying yes to hard, messy problems in businesses that were broken, not from chasing the prettiest job description. When you step into chaos, like turnarounds, distressed operations, or pre-sale prep, you learn how value is really created. That makes you indispensable. You stop being “in a role” and start being “the person who can fix it,” and that is power.
- 2) **Money:** Treat yourself like an asset, not an employee. Negotiate with the exit in mind. Ask for equity, success fees, or a seat at the table when value is realised. Cash flow pays bills. Ownership changes your life.
- 3) **Relationships:** Stay close to the people who raise standards, tell you the truth, and want you to win. Let go of people who drain you or keep you small, even if they’ve “always been there.” Loyalty is good. Self-betrayal is not.
- 4) **Health:** Your body is not optional infrastructure. When you are exhausted, you make emotional decisions, not strategic ones. Sleep, strength, and boundaries will save you more than any productivity hack.
- 5) **Personal life:** Build a life you do not want to run away from. You cannot outsource joy to “after the deal” or “once this round closes.” Do the dinner. Go to the match. Love your people in real time. Businesses can be rebuilt. Moments can’t.

You are allowed to want wealth, freedom, impact, and a calm nervous system. Do not accept the story that you must choose. You don’t. You just have to design it on purpose.



Mark Boey

Founder & Creative Director of Untitled Studio – Australia

untitled.

You know what? If I had to give myself one piece of advice that changed everything for me, it would be this: **Just say yes. Back yourself. Trust your gut.**

You do not need to have all the answers. Some of my best decisions, like launching the studio, pitching big ideas, or taking on clients far above our weight, happened because I trusted my instinct. I did not overthink it. I just went for it. It is mindset. It is belief. Not loud or flashy, just that calm inner voice saying, “Yes, I have got this.”

If you want to move fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with the right people. There have been times I went solo, from pulling together an entire pitch deck overnight to designing, animating, and delivering a campaign end to end. It is fast. It is focused. You get things done.

But then there are projects like the light show in Beijing. Massive, multi-layered, high stakes. That was not a one-person job. It took a dream team: storytellers, engineers, technicians, and designers, all in sync and bringing their best. That **scale and that impact only happen when you build with the right people.**

The best work I have ever done has never been on my own. It has always been with incredible collaborators, partners, and teams who see the vision and bring something new to the table. **The right people do not just help you grow.** They keep you grounded. They stretch your thinking. They remind you why you started in the first place.

Trust your gut. Think outside the box.



Gea Klopčar

Founder of Forma X – Slovenia



Take advice only from those who have already walked the path you wish to take, and make sure to actively place yourself among such people as much as possible. Reach out to those who inspire you, find a way to connect with them, and let them become part of your close circle. If you're an ambitious young hard-worker, most successful individuals will be happy to support you, at least those you truly want to model yourself after.

The path of entrepreneurship is an incredible opportunity for personal growth. It brings a wide spectrum of emotions and lessons about yourself and the cycles of life. Sometimes you'll be riding the high wave of success, feeling free and unstoppable, and the next moment an unexpected twist will teach you humility and remind you of your own sense of worth. **Try to separate the success of your business from your sense of self-worth** as much as possible. It's not always easy, but whenever you feel the ground shaking beneath your feet, come back to your core priorities and ask yourself if you're living in alignment with them. Then focus on understanding what the current situation is trying to teach you. Every fall, setback, or 'injustice' is there to help you grow. The sooner you turn the 'victim' within you into a 'student,' the faster you'll evolve.

Courage is rewarded with freedom. **Explore your fears and keep putting yourself into situations that feel uncomfortable**, to build your tolerance for fear until it fades. The less irrational fear you feel, the more opportunities will open up in your life, and as you grow more adaptable to discomfort, you'll also develop a deeper sense of inner peace. When you act from that state, your reactions are no longer impulsive; you become an observer, and the world seems to move slower, from emotional distance and a greater sense of understanding. That's how everything becomes just a game.



Jernej Picelj

Founder & CEO of ZaLife – Slovenia



If I could go back and start my entrepreneurial journey again, I would begin with one word in mind: **trust in yourself**.

- 1) **Stop chasing validation and start chasing purpose:** The goal is not to convince others but to keep going until results speak for you. Purpose gives direction when everything feels uncertain.
- 2) **Build slower with stronger foundations:** Speed without direction leads to chaos. The structures you cannot see, such as values, systems, culture, and communication, are the ones that sustain you. Build slowly so progress lasts.
- 3) **Trust intuition more than experts:** Advice is everywhere, but much of it comes from someone else's fears. Always return to honesty and authenticity, and people will respond to that. When you do, connection strengthens and growth becomes natural. Intuition supported by experience wins every time.
- 4) **Embrace discomfort:** Growth never becomes easier; you simply grow stronger. Seek hard moments early, learn from them, and move forward. Real growth happens in the moments when you want to quit but keep going.
- 5) **Redefine success:** Success is not about numbers but alignment between what you do and why you do it. When your work carries meaning, profit follows naturally. True success feels calm, not loud.
- 6) **Surround yourself with people who challenge you:** Not everyone will grow with you. Protect your energy and stay close to those who make you think bigger. One wrong connection can drain months of progress.
- 7) **Learn financial literacy early:** Emotional intelligence is not enough without understanding money. Treat finances as essential, not as something to avoid. Money sustains your mission and gives freedom to make choices based on vision, not fear.
- 8) **Communicate honestly:** Silence creates assumptions. Clear and direct communication builds trust faster than perfection. Say what you mean, set expectations, and face conflicts early. Clarity protects relationships.
- 9) **Celebrate small wins:** Big goals are built from small victories. Each bit of progress matters. Gratitude fuels confidence, and confidence sustains resilience.
- 10) **Focus on impact, not image:** Visibility is not value. Real influence comes when people's lives change because of your work. Authenticity creates trust, and trust builds communities.
- 11) **Lead through service:** Leadership is not control but responsibility. It means creating a space where others can grow. Empower your team and share ownership.
- 12) **See failure as feedback:** Failure teaches lessons that success cannot. Each setback strengthens humility, patience, and adaptability. Learn fast and move forward.
- 13) **Play the long game and never lose your why:** Entrepreneurship is about building something that lasts. You are not behind; you are early in your story. Your purpose is your anchor when things get hard. For me, it has always been about helping people find meaning, confidence, and direction. Stay true to that, and you will always find your way back to purpose.



Marta Grutka

Founder of Bspoke Consultancy and MGlobal Advisory – Singapore

The most transformative advice I can give any entrepreneur is this: **you can always make another choice.** In 2008, after years of global leadership roles, I launched my own international consultancy. Overnight, I went from corporate comfort to continuous chaos, building a 30-person hybrid team, being client-facing, managing the back end, and perpetually pitching, all amidst cashflow unpredictability, visa restrictions, and the often-overlooked isolation of being a solo founder.

There were many moments when the hustle hollowed me out. But instead of pushing through, I chose to pause. I reinvested in my own growth, leaned on mentors and co-mentors, and eventually returned to corporate leadership by choice. It was not a step back but a strategic pivot that allowed me to rebuild with renewed clarity and purpose.

Here are the principles I now live by:

- 1) **Tune in, then act:** Your intuition is your most underutilized business tool. Learn how to hear it and trust it.
- 2) **Redefine wealth:** Holistic abundance including health, love, and self-respect is as important, if not more so, than financial gain.
- 3) **Build your bench:** No one succeeds alone. Community is, quite literally, your best friend.
- 4) **Give to grow:** Volunteering and mentoring don't slow you down. They broaden your perspective and build prosperity.
- 5) **Space is a strategy:** Meditation, movement, and other mindfulness practices aren't luxuries. They are ROI multipliers.

The entrepreneur's journey isn't linear, but it is far more enjoyable when you remember that **you are always one conscious choice away from changing any outcome.**





Petra Prcač Dolinšek

Founder of Birotranslations | Co-Owner of Veris |
Founder & Co-Owner of EcoDogs (Loving Paw) – Slovenia

If I could give advice to my younger self at the start of my entrepreneurial journey, it would be this: **Stress less, listen more, and make decisions calmly rather than in the heat of the moment.** In the early days, I often let emotions dictate my choices or worried excessively about pleasing everyone. Over time, I realized that no matter how much effort you put in, not every employee, partner, or client will be completely satisfied, and that's okay.

I would tell myself to **trust the process and to focus on what truly matters:** making thoughtful decisions, learning from mistakes, and maintaining clarity of purpose. Listening is a skill I wish I had valued more. By truly understanding the perspectives of others, you can make better decisions and build stronger relationships. Patience and reflection, rather than impulsive reactions, often lead to far better outcomes than rushing to fix things immediately.

Another important lesson is that **self-compassion and boundaries are essential.** As a leader, you can give your best, but you cannot control everything or everyone. There will always be challenges, disagreements, and frustrations, and learning to accept that is liberating. At the end of the day, what matters most is knowing that you gave your all and acted with integrity.

If I could start over, I would **focus less on perfection and more on progress.** I would celebrate small wins, listen actively, and make decisions with a steady mind. I would remind myself that leadership is a journey of growth, patience, and balance, and that peace of mind comes from doing your best, not from trying to make everyone happy.





Dino Giergia

Founder & CEO of Dea Flores – Croatia



DEA FLORES

I've noticed that the advice I would offer depends heavily on the situation. But one constant I have found is that life is a continuous cycle of ups and downs, shifting between good and bad. **Change itself is not inherently good or bad.** It is our perspective that gives it meaning. I usually shy away from giving advice unless someone directly asks for it, but here is what I would tell my younger self.

Life is tough, just like the work you do. But the people in your life give it profound meaning. The love you nurture for them plays an infinitely vital role. So the first lesson I would impart is this: **Love the people around you as deeply as you can.** Give them your attention, affirm their importance, and empower them. The impact these people have on your life is extraordinary.

Second, **life comes in phases.** Just as the moon's cycles raise and lower the tides, your work and life have their own ebbs and flows. Sometimes things are a bit better, sometimes less so. The key is you, your ability to observe these changes. In other words, do not invest too much emotionally. Let go, life is too short anyway. As you grow older, you realize nothing lasts forever. No matter how tough a situation is, it always passes one way or another. **Stay present and aware.**

Patience is a virtue I wish I had in greater supply. Depending on your personality, and I am an incredibly impatient person, constantly chasing the next wave will never yield results. **Results require consistency, and consistency requires time.** So choose your projects wisely and stick with them, even when it feels like it is time to move on. This philosophy fosters deep mastery. It might not seem like it now, but time is a prerequisite for expertise.

All your dissatisfaction with yourself and your career stems from comparing yourself to others. For you, and I suspect for many others, this is a toxic pill. **Everyone has their own path, their own plan, their own destiny.** The problem with comparison is that it treats happiness as something external, out there somewhere, rather than within you. That is why you are never truly happy, because there is always someone imaginary who is more successful or better.

From my perspective, being intelligent and successful is not a privilege, it is a responsibility. It is the duty of anyone who recognizes their own possibilities. **The challenge lies in unlocking that potential.** This is not easy. It demands many disappointments and incremental steps. One thing that had a staggering impact on my professional life was working with a performance coach. I strongly recommend finding someone older who can share critical insights in a way that resonates with you.

Strive to preserve your mental health and physical strength. You will need both when you have children. Mental health is key, and I sincerely advise practicing meditation and yoga. They will keep you feeling young.

Finally, the mountain ahead of you is only as big as your expectations of yourself. **Equip yourself with the right tools and tackle that challenge.** You have got this.



Gina Fors Secall

Co-Founder of Metanoia – Spain

METANOIA

If I were starting my journey again, I would remind myself that **success is not about speed but about depth**. Building something meaningful takes time, and the most important part of that process is who you become while building it.

At the beginning, I thought I needed to have everything under control: my services perfectly defined, my market clearly mapped, and my next steps fully planned. I wanted to answer every question before moving forward. But some answers only emerge by walking the path. There is wisdom in accepting that **not knowing is part of the journey**, and that each person's rhythm has its own intelligence.

One of the most transformative lessons came early on, when we decided to let go of our first client. On paper, it made no sense; it was our starting point, but it drained our energy. Listening to that intuition created the space for new opportunities that were much more aligned with our purpose. That experience taught me that **intuition is also strategy, just expressed in a different language**.

Over time, I also realized how the business world often operates from a very masculine paradigm: faster, bigger, more people, more growth. And while growth can be beautiful, it can also become a trap if it disconnects you from your purpose. Not everything is about money; **abundance comes when you are faithful to the value you want to create**. This more feminine and impact-oriented perspective also generates wealth, both economic and spiritual.

So I would tell my younger self to **trust your timing, your intuition, and your purpose**. Do not rush to fit into someone else's version of success. The right opportunities will find you when you have the courage to create space and stay true to what feels meaningful.



Pepa Ruiz Ojeda

Co-Founder of Metanoia – Spain

METANOIA

If I were starting my journey again, I would remind myself that entrepreneurship is not a sprint; it's a practice of patience, trust, and learning to live with uncertainty. When you start something from scratch, there's always more you don't know than what you do, and that's perfectly fine. In the early days, I thought my main job was to make things happen, to push, to solve, to anticipate every problem. Today, I know that some of the most valuable things I've done came from pausing instead of pushing. **Clarity often appears in silence, not in movement.**

Another key lesson has been about partnership. Co-creating Metanoia with Gina has shown me that **collaboration is not always easy**, but it's deeply enriching when it's built on trust, transparency, and shared purpose. Learning to disagree with respect, to slow down and understand the other's view, and to integrate differences has shaped the strength and coherence of what we've built together.

Finally, I would tell my younger self: **Don't be afraid of stillness.** There will be moments when you don't know where the next step will come from. That's not failure; it's space, space for new ideas, new people, and new opportunities to appear.

So I'd say: **Take care of your energy, surround yourself with people who expand you, and trust the process.** What's meant to unfold will do so in its own time.



Dimitrije Iskrenović

Founder of Qreadible – Serbia



My biggest piece of advice for any future entrepreneur is to **spend your free time exploring and learning as many different things as possible**. Developing new skills, even those that might seem unrelated to your goals, proved crucial for our startup because we often had to handle unexpected situations on our own. Being able to do things yourself without hiring new people in the early stages is essential. But don't see this as a chore, treat it as a daily challenge that helps you grow and, later on, gives you a deeper appreciation for the value of other people's work.

Another important piece of advice is to **get your message out and connect with potential users as early as possible**. It can be intimidating, and many people won't be immediately receptive to your idea, but this is the best way to understand your real position in the market.

Finally, **never fear rejection**. It's a natural part of the process and often the best source of insight. Just because someone doesn't believe in your idea today doesn't mean the idea isn't good or that they won't see its value in the future.



Miguel Galvão

Founder & CEO of Ouitake Studios – Portugal



One piece of advice that has had the biggest impact on my journey as a photographer, entrepreneur, and individual is this: **Build relationships, not just a portfolio**. When I started Ouitake Studios, I was focused on creating visually perfect images and videos. Over time, I learned that what truly builds a lasting business is not just technical skill, but trust, emotional connection, and the way people feel when they work with you.

Clients do not just remember the photos; they remember how you made them feel in their most important moments. **Prioritize empathy, communication, and being fully present**, whether you are shooting a wedding, a corporate event, or a quiet family celebration. Be the calm in the chaos, the reliable professional they can count on.

This mindset has brought more referrals, better collaborations, and deeper satisfaction than any gear upgrade or editing trick. It has also supported personal growth, making me more grounded, more mindful, and better at navigating the highs and lows of both life and business. The more you invest in people, whether clients, collaborators, or friends, the more everything else falls into place: opportunities, finances, even health and work-life balance.



Michelle France

Co-Founder of Strategic Business Connect – UAE



Your network is your net worth. But it is not about collecting business cards or adding names to your phone. It is about forming deep, purposeful relationships with people who align with your values and goals.

When I first started, I fell into the trap of thinking I needed to connect with as many people as possible. I soon learned **it is far more powerful to slow down, listen, collaborate, and invest in a small circle of relationships** that truly matter. Those strong connections opened doors I had not even noticed, from securing my first clients to forming partnerships that helped me grow much faster.

Surround yourself with people who have already walked the path you want to travel and learn from their experience. You really do become the average of the people you spend time with, and choosing that circle strategically can make or break your future.

It is also essential to **keep investing in yourself and developing your skills**. The world moves quickly, and there is no shortage of training and resources. Be selective, be strategic, and focus on what directly helps you grow and move closer to your goals.

Managing financial health was another game-changer for me. Successful entrepreneurship is not just about making profits; it is about managing cash flow, honoring obligations, and **making careful decisions that enable future growth**. For me, this meant keeping business and personal accounts separate, creating realistic budgets, and maintaining financial discipline.

Finally, I made self-care and well-being non-negotiable. **This is a marathon, not a sprint**. Without rest, reflection, and routines to stay grounded and motivated, I would not have been able to show up at my best, for my business, my team, or myself.

And remember this: You can be excellent at your craft, whether you are a marketer, a software developer, or a designer, but if you neglect the business side, it is hard to translate expertise into sustained success. **Pay attention to both your skills and your business fundamentals.**

If I can share one piece of guidance from my own path, it is this: Build relationships with authenticity, manage your finances with discipline, care for your health, keep learning, and surround yourself with people who lift you up. **Sustainable success comes from patience, persistence, and staying true to yourself.**



KaT Zarychta

Founder of KatFenix and KNew Me – Malta



The single piece of advice that reshaped my entire trajectory is to **build long-lasting relationships without any hidden agenda**. When you meet someone simply to learn about them, you open a door to trust, collaboration, and unexpected opportunities. As Dale Carnegie put it, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” Curiosity is the engine: ask real questions, listen twice as much as you speak, and keep a “people notebook” to note what lights each person up. Circle back when you find something they would love, and host small, purpose-free gatherings such as breakfasts, hikes, or book swaps so serendipity can compound.

Boldness follows curiosity. **Pursue your dreams** even when the path is uncertain, but treat setbacks as pivots rather than dead ends. I have met many successful people who are perfect illustrations of this mindset, a global force at the intersection of deep science, finance, market transformation, and international policy. Their careers show how relentless curiosity, strategic pivots, and authentic networking can reshape industries.

My advice would be:

- 1) Meet people with genuine interest, not for a transaction.
- 2) Keep learning: read outside your lane, listen to podcasts, and explore cross-disciplinary research.
- 3) Be bold enough to chase a vision, but flexible enough to pivot when data or desire shifts.
- 4) Share your progress openly; the relationships you nurture become the safety net that lets you take bigger risks.

Finally, protect the engine that makes all this possible, your health and energy. Schedule workouts and sleep the way you schedule board meetings. A drained mind cannot notice opportunities, and a burned-out body cannot nurture relationships. Cultivate genuine interest, stay endlessly curious, pivot without fear, and guard your vitality. Everything else, capital, insight, and fulfillment, flows from there.



Aleksa Peruničić

Founder of BoarVenturers – Serbia



The greatest lesson I've learned is that **community is the real catalyst for growth**. No matter how ambitious or capable you are as an individual, your journey accelerates when you are surrounded by people who share knowledge, open doors, and challenge you to think differently.

When I founded BoarVenturers, it was never about creating another startup club; it was about building a place where stubborn dreamers and doers could come together, support one another, and turn ideas into reality. Time and again, I've seen how one introduction, one honest piece of feedback, or one shared resource can completely change the direction of someone's project or career. That does not happen in isolation; it happens when people are willing to give before they expect to receive.

The advice that has shaped me most is this: **Invest in your community, and it will invest in you**. Celebrate others' wins as if they were your own. Show up not only when you need help but also when someone else does. Be generous with your experience and curious about theirs.

In the end, companies rise and fall, but the relationships you build through community last much longer. They give you resilience in hard times and multiply your successes in good ones. For me, **community is not an addition to the entrepreneurial journey, it is the foundation of it**.



Bina Mathews

Founder & Master Executive Coach of Bina Mathews Consulting – UAE



Coming from a corporate background where I had a highly specialized role, it was both liberating and intimidating to be a whole team alone. If possible, **prepare for entrepreneurship while you have the safety net** of a full-time job. Identify the new skills you will require and acquire them either through your current role or by getting the necessary training or certifications, etc.

Also, **speak with people who are doing what you are planning to do**. Have candid conversations to understand the real-life challenges you will face so you can be forewarned and prepare accordingly. A common myth, in my opinion, which has been corroborated by others, is that your contact list will magically become your customer base. Not true. Do not leap into your new business based only on the faith that you have a ready list of clients. Use the preparation period to sound out your business concept with people you are counting on to be your clients. Get a real response that will guide your strategy.

Ensure you are building a nest egg that will cover you for the first year. This frees you from the stress of turning a profit and protects you from making wrong decisions to make a quick buck.

Share your business concept, why you want to do it and how it will impact your life, with your family. It will impact them too, and if you have their buy-in you have the best foundation to start from. **Work on a plan to get the family through the initial teething period:** budgeting, time, travel plans, everything will be impacted, so be prepared.

Be clear about your worth and your market positioning. Do your due diligence and honestly and objectively assess your billing power. It's important that you genuinely believe in the value you provide and what it is worth to your clients. So when you get clients who want to bargain and negotiate down to ridiculous levels, you will be able to stand your ground and hold out for the ones who value you. **Remember not to overvalue yourself or oversell your abilities as a beginner.** Your reputation begins to be built from the moment you announce your business, and everything you say and do affects it.

Be clear about why you are launching your business. Spend time and really flesh it out before you do anything else. Perhaps work with a coach who will help you understand your core values and how they affect how you run your business. This will be priceless down the road when you hit every pothole and road bump and wonder what you are doing and whether you even want to do it anymore. Coming back to the reason you started will always give you your second wind, or help you make some course corrections and find your way back.



Custódio Barreiros

Founder & CEO of EIP MGT – Austria



The most useful advice I've carried across roles, sectors, and seasons boils down to five disciplines: **Listen deeply, learn continuously, choose partners wisely, protect your morals, and trust your gut.**

Listening is the force multiplier. Slow the room down, hear the unstated constraints, and reflect back what you've understood. It turns noise into insight and avoids expensive rework. Pair it with continuous learning, small, regular deposits of practice and reflection that compound over time. Don't hoard information; operationalize it. Plan, test, train, and make change stick. In careers this means iterating deliberately; in relationships it means curiosity before certainty; in health and finances it means habits over hacks and boring consistency over theatrics.

Partnerships either accelerate you or anchor you. The right partners share values, raise standards, and shoulder risk; the wrong ones erode focus and integrity. My quick test is simple: put values before velocity, make sure roles are defined before enthusiasm takes over, demand evidence before believing promises, and always agree on a one-page set of success criteria that covers objectives, measures, cadence, and an exit plan.

On morals and the power of no: "Everything is Possible" isn't a hall pass for shortcuts. It is a commitment to possibility through integrity, effort, and design. Say no to quick wins that mortgage trust, attention, or reputation. Opportunism is expensive; alignment is compounding. **Choose pace you can sustain, quality you can defend, and outcomes you can measure.**

And then, the often-ignored edge: **Trust your gut.** Intuition is pattern recognition trained by experience and reflection. When data is thin and timelines are tight, your gut is a decision accelerant, provided you verify it. My rule is simple: feel it, name it, test it. If a partner, client, or hire does not sit right, pause. If the deal looks perfect but your stomach tightens, you are seeing a risk your spreadsheet has not.

Four prompts I return to again and again are these: What am I not hearing yet? What did I learn today that will change tomorrow? Does this partner raise our standards and share our risk? And if I say yes here, what am I saying no to and will my future self be proud of that choice?

Listen to understand. Learn to adapt. Partner to elevate. Guard your compass. Trust your instincts and verify them. That is how belief becomes execution, and how "Everything is Possible" remains ambitious, practical, and honest.



Zita Monostori

Co-Founder & Creative Director of This is Me Sneakers – UAE

Starting an entrepreneurial journey is both exciting and daunting. Having a strong belief that you've found a solution to a specific problem is a great start, but you also need to be sure that this journey is truly what you want and that you can manage it in your life. Ask yourself if you are able to manage your time effectively, work on different projects simultaneously, and sustain yourself on a low income until your business reaches its first milestone and you can afford to set a higher salary.

If you are a small team, **be prepared to dig deep into many areas:** fundraising, building a compelling pitch deck, understanding ROI, and learning the basics of marketing and social media. Your life will become a constant learning process, and while it can be challenging, it will also be deeply rewarding once your company succeeds.

Another crucial piece of advice is to **spend money wisely in the early stages.** Invest only where it is truly necessary, such as product development or brand visibility. Overspending too early can leave you short on cash flow, forcing you to raise money faster than planned and potentially compromising important elements of your growth or exit strategy.

Leverage your expertise, make use of your network, and be ready to pivot when necessary to reach your goals. Above all, **enjoy the process of building something that, hopefully, will improve the lives of many people.**



**THIS IS ME
SNEAKERS**
انشغال يدوية
HANDCRAFTED ART



Furio Barzon

Founder of Green Prefab – Italy

greenprefab

One of the most important lessons I have learned is to **reduce the time from idea to execution**. It is almost always better to implement something quickly and well enough than to plan it perfectly and delay. Speed creates feedback, momentum, and opportunities. As soon as you have executed successfully enough, strike while the iron is hot. When something starts to work, do not rest on early success. Push even harder to reach the next milestone before the momentum fades. It can fade faster than you think.

Also, **trust your own vision**. Do not hesitate just because someone says it is impossible. At the same time, listen carefully to those who doubt the business potential. Instead of dismissing them, try to understand how you might adapt or integrate their concerns to make your idea truly viable.

Never assume a deal is closed until it truly is. Even if you are one step away, even if you have signed, even during execution, surprises happen.

The most important thing is you: **Take care of yourself**. "Mens sana in corpore sano" is not a cliché, it is a strategy. Over time, I quit smoking and drinking, calibrated my diet and exercise, practiced meditation, and saw huge benefits in clarity, energy, and resilience. You also need to balance work time with personal time. Only by protecting space for rest, distraction, and reflection can you sustain high performance at work.



Phyll Opoku-Gyimah

Co-Founder & CEO of UK Black Pride – UK



The most powerful lesson I have learned is that **leadership rooted in authenticity and community is far stronger than leadership driven by ego or individual ambition**. In every stage of my journey, from being a civil servant to leading international human rights work to co-founding UK Black Pride, I have seen that people flourish when they are affirmed, seen, and heard.

The advice I carry is this: **Know your values and let them guide you in every decision**. When you centre justice, integrity, and care, you will not only achieve your goals, but you will also bring others with you. For me, that has meant prioritising collective growth over individual gain, investing in relationships that are reciprocal, and understanding that rest and joy are not indulgences; they are essential to sustainability.

Financial management and work-life balance are also crucial. I have made mistakes by giving more than I had, whether in time, money, or energy, but I have learned that boundaries are a form of self-preservation and love. Surround yourself with people who lift you up, hold you accountable, and remind you of your worth. And remember, **you do not have to be perfect**; you just have to be present, committed, and courageous.

Above all, **embrace the journey as much as the outcome**. The path may not always be easy, but it is in the challenges that resilience is built, and it is in the moments of joy and solidarity that true success is measured.



Alexander Theofilis

Founder of Oak Tree Industries – USA



Move with urgency, but always with intention. Time is the most valuable asset you have, especially when you are young. Leverage your energy, adaptability, and boldness to move swiftly, but ensure that every step is aligned with a long-term vision. Speed without strategy leads to burnout. Precision with pace leads to legacy.

Curate your environment with discipline. Who you surround yourself with will determine the trajectory of your growth. Build relationships with individuals who elevate your standards, who have achieved what you seek to accomplish, and who embody the values you aspire to uphold. Protect your circle with vigilance. Integrity and alignment are non-negotiables.

Master the art of capital stewardship. Before chasing scale, understand structure. Learn how wealth is preserved, not just earned. Prioritize ownership, cash flow, and control. Build platforms that can endure, reinvest, and compound, not just for yourself but for those who will come after you.

Detach from short-term emotion and commit to long-term discipline. The road to excellence is paved with moments of doubt, silence, and isolation. Use them. Let adversity sharpen your focus, not sway your direction. Your consistency in the quiet seasons is what ultimately defines your impact.

And above all, **pursue significance over applause.** Aim to build something enduring, something that serves, scales, and outlives you. Let your work speak louder than your words, and let your discipline define your reputation.

As my mentor would say, **Keep pushing.**



Lara Tabet

Founder of Luxurywithlara – UAE



If I could travel back in time and sit across from my twenty-something self, bright-eyed, ambitious, and perhaps a little naïve, I would take her hand, smile knowingly, and whisper, **"You're going to be fine, but don't rush to prove it."**

Back then, success felt like a finish line. Today, I understand it is a lifelong marathon of learning, evolving, falling, and rising again with more grace and self-awareness each time.

- 1) **Purpose Before Perfection:** Your business should reflect your values, not perform for the world. Purpose gives resilience when things get hard. Perfection breaks; purpose endures.
- 2) **Start Before You Feel Ready:** You will never know enough. Confidence is acting despite fear. Progress beats waiting for perfect conditions.
- 3) **Invest in Your Reputation:** Credibility is currency. Be consistent, keep your word, and treat everyone with respect. Integrity and warmth never go out of style.
- 4) **You Don't Have to Do It Alone:** True leadership means collaboration. Build a team, listen to mentors, and focus on what you do best. Asking for help shows wisdom, not weakness.
- 5) **Run Your Own Race:** Comparison kills joy. Authenticity has no competition. Celebrate progress, not perfection.
- 6) **Build Financial Confidence Early:** Understand your numbers, negotiate your worth, and never hand control of your finances to anyone else. Financial literacy gives freedom.
- 7) **Protect Your Energy:** Set boundaries. Rest is strategy, not indulgence. Learn to say no to stay aligned with your path.
- 8) **Stay Curious and Keep Evolving:** The world changes fast. Keep learning, reading, traveling, and connecting with diverse minds. Growth lives at the intersection of curiosity and courage.
- 9) **Kindness Is a Superpower:** Empathy builds trust and lasting networks. People remember how you make them feel. Stay humane.
- 10) **Define Success on Your Own Terms:** Success is freedom, not validation. Define it by alignment between your values, work, and joy.
- 11) **Enjoy the Journey:** Your twenties are for mistakes, lessons, and growth. Trust the timing of your life and believe in yourself.

To sum it up: **Elegance in business begins with authenticity.** When you lead with integrity, curiosity, and heart, opportunities find you. To my younger self and to every young woman reading this, remember that luxury is not about what you own, but how you live, how you treat others, and how confidently you embrace your own story. **The world needs your brilliance.** Start now, stay kind, keep learning, and never forget that your voice, your vision, and your values are your greatest assets.



Jean-Christian Rindoni

Founder & CEO of Symbiosis Infinity Group – Canada



Starting a business is more than just making money; it's about **creating a meaningful impact**. Many entrepreneurs focus solely on profit, but true success comes from aligning business goals with a greater purpose.

My journey in international business, spanning 30+ countries, led me to realize that **businesses lacking purpose** often struggle with sustainability. This insight inspired me to establish Symbiosis Infinity Group, where I help companies integrate conscious growth, balancing economic success with ethical responsibility.

I learned that a **business without purpose is like a ship without direction**. Purpose provides clarity, resilience, and a strong foundation for long-term success. Companies like Patagonia and Tesla thrive because they prioritize their mission, attracting dedicated employees, loyal customers, and meaningful partnerships.

Key Benefits of a Purpose-Driven Business:

- 1) **Sustainable Success:** Aligning profit with purpose builds trust and long-term growth.
- 2) **Innovation & Adaptability:** A clear mission fuels creativity and resilience.
- 3) **Authentic Leadership:** Leading with integrity attracts the right people.
- 4) **Better Decision-Making:** Purpose guides strategic choices beyond financial gains.
- 5) **Lasting Impact:** A mission-driven business leaves a meaningful legacy.

How to Build a Purpose-Driven Business:

- 1) **Define Your Why:** What positive change does your business bring?
- 2) **Align Purpose with Profit:** A mission should drive revenue, not compete with it.
- 3) **Communicate Clearly:** Purpose should be central to branding and company culture.
- 4) **Build a Like-Minded Team:** Hire those who share your vision.
- 5) **Lead with Integrity:** Stay true to your mission in all business decisions.
- 6) **Measure Impact:** Track how your business benefits society and the environment.

Purpose is the foundation of a truly successful business. When you align your goals with a deeper mission, you create lasting impact and long-term success. Are you building for profit or to leave a legacy? The answer will define your journey.



Inés Bosnjak Rindoni

Founder & CEO of Mindset High-Performance Coaching – Canada

INÉS BOSNIAK

If I could start over, I'd tell my younger self to **trust stillness as much as action**. I used to believe success meant constant motion, achieving, proving, producing, but I've learned that real progress happens when your mind, body, and values move in coherence. I'd remind her that the nervous system is not an obstacle to overcome; it's a compass. The moments of exhaustion, doubt, or guilt weren't signs of weakness; they were invitations to realign with purpose.

I'd say: Slow down enough to listen. Breathe before you build. **Let clarity lead before strategy follows**. Because the truth is, the most powerful results don't come from force; they come from presence, alignment, and integrity. The clients, partnerships, and opportunities that are truly yours will always meet you where you stand in authenticity, not where you rush to be.

So my advice would be simple but radical: **Lead with coherence, not urgency**. Create from resonance, not reaction. And remember, your energy is your legacy.



Laura Mulas

Founder & CEO of Bitorbit & Wanderflare – Germany

 WANDERFLARE

 bitorbit

If I could restart my entrepreneurial journey with the knowledge I have now, I'd tell my younger self that **building something meaningful takes time, curiosity, and humility**. The real key is to never stop learning. Every project, challenge, and setback becomes a masterclass if you keep your mind open.

I'd also remind myself of something I only truly learned through experience. **It's okay to pivot**. Sometimes the vision you start with isn't the one that will take you where you're meant to go. That's not failure. The best entrepreneurs I've met aren't the ones who never change direction. They are the ones who know when to shift, adapt, and rebuild with clarity and courage.

Entrepreneurship isn't a straight line. It's a constant cycle of learning, unlearning, and reimagining. You'll have moments of doubt, and that's okay. Those are the moments that teach you the most. Stay curious, stay bold, and don't be afraid to change course when instinct and knowledge align. That's where real growth begins.



Marius Pașculea

Co-Founder & CEO of KULTH – Romania



Entrepreneurship is not just about strategy, funding, or execution; it is a deeply philosophical journey of becoming. To truly evolve as a founder, one must first seek to understand the world not merely through data or trends, but through philosophy, the discipline that clarifies existence itself. **Philosophy sharpens perception**; it forces you to confront questions of purpose, ethics, and meaning, helping you make decisions rooted not only in reason but in authenticity. A founder who reflects philosophically learns to see beyond surface metrics and to sense the deeper cultural shifts shaping human behavior.

Equally vital is understanding art, not as decoration or entertainment, but as a mirror of emotion and context. Immersing yourself in the art phenomenon teaches empathy, nuance, and the subtleties of human experience. **Art cultivates emotional intelligence**, helping you connect with future customers not as consumers but as complex individuals with layered aspirations and fears. The entrepreneur who understands art understands people, and in business, empathy is the ultimate competitive advantage.

Then comes the force that propels everything forward: ambition. To build something meaningful, you must believe, sometimes irrationally, that your vision matters. **The greatest founders carry a spark of beautiful**, a willingness to bend reality until it fits the shape of their dream. Without that audacity, no breakthrough happens.

And yet, even the most resilient visionaries need an anchor. The presence of someone who truly loves and believes in you, who sustains your energy when the world doubts, can be the quiet force that keeps you from collapsing under your own expectations. **Entrepreneurship is, at its core, an act of love**: love for an idea, for humanity, and for the few who choose to stand beside you when the future still looks impossible.



Elizabeth K. Briody

Founder & Principal of Cultural Keys – USA



I have been fortunate to lead two entrepreneurial ventures in the second half of my career. The first, Cultural Keys LLC, is a research and consulting practice I founded in 2009. The second, launched in 2021, is the Anthropology Career Readiness Network (ACRN). Comparing these two ventures has revealed four key lessons about the early stages of client relationships. Without a strong initial connection, lasting success is unlikely. Consequently, my suggestions emphasize strategies for the early stage of client interaction.

- 1) **Understand the client landscape:** Learn who your clients are, what they do, and which issues they face. Some information is available through secondary sources such as news reports, public documents, or broadcasts, especially if the client is in the public eye. Focus on people who are most likely to appreciate what your venture offers. Consider whether your product or service is suited to older adults, working adults, Generation Z, or Generation Alpha. Is it designed for individuals, groups, or organizations? Gathering this information helps validate that your offering resonates with the right audience.
- 2) **Seek out prospective clients:** Begin with your existing network of friends, colleagues, and family. Share your business card, website, and marketing materials. Tell them you are just getting started and would value their support or advice. Networking with people you already know helps generate new ideas and provides introductions to potential clients. Consider joining local groups or community organizations, or presenting at conferences, trade shows, or networking events. These venues allow you to listen, share ideas, and make contacts. Use LinkedIn and other social media to post insights and issues related to your venture. These strategies will increase your visibility among individuals and organizations that might need or want your product or service.
- 3) **Prepare for the first formal client discussion:** Research the specific client, their role, and their organization. The goal is to begin a relationship, not to sell your product in the first meeting. Start by explaining the context of the meeting (for example, "John Weiss suggested I meet you," or "We met at the City Council meeting last week"). Prepare thoughtful questions that help you learn about the client, such as "What issues keep you up at night these days?" or "How does your organization manage employee and volunteer turnover?". Identify three key points to share about your venture, ideally later in the conversation. For example, you might briefly describe your mission and connect it to an issue the prospective client mentioned.
- 4) **Let the client do most of the talking:** A good rule of thumb is 70:30, with the client speaking about 70 percent of the time and you speaking about 30 percent. Treat the meeting as fieldwork: your aim is to build rapport and learn what matters to the client. You cannot gain this insight if you spend most of the time talking about yourself. However, be ready to introduce your venture and highlight how it might align with the client's needs. Ideally, the first meeting will lead to a second, where you are invited to share more about the value of your enterprise.



Jason Helfenbaum

Founder & President of ClickKnowledge – Canada



Although I believe each of these will help you on your entrepreneurial journey, perhaps more importantly, they will also help you on your life journey.

- 1) **Be your best friend:** We often speak to ourselves with harshness while treating friends with kindness. Be kind to yourself. You have a long journey ahead and you need love and support, starting with yourself.
- 2) **Rip off the Band-Aid:** There may be a moment of pain, but it is almost always followed by relief. Confront your fears. By facing them, you take ownership. They do not own you. You own them.
- 3) **Embrace failure:** Failure is the crooked path that gets you where you ultimately want to go. Focus on the progress you are making and how it brings you closer to your goals. If it does not, let it go and retrace your steps.
- 4) **Have mentors:** It is far more efficient to learn from others' experiences than only your own. Picture the kind of person you want to be in 10 to 20 years, and then find people living that way. Not defined by their house or car, but by their traits and how they interact with the world. Good mentors want to mentor, so do not be shy to ask. As long as you hold up your end, they also gain by giving.
- 5) **Shit is shit:** Surround yourself with people who will call you out with kindness. You will save yourself pain and avoid unnecessary mess.
- 6) **Listen more than you talk:** When you do speak, ask questions more than you give answers. This lets you guide conversations and walk away richer. Prospects will tell you their needs, and employees will reveal how your company or offering can improve.
- 7) **Lead with kindness and respect:** Treat people with decency and respect. You will be surprised what they will do for you. In the professional world this is rare, and people often value it more than money or titles.
- 8) **Make an accountability plan:** Decide what you want to achieve in a year. Break it down into monthly goals, then daily steps. Hold yourself accountable every step of the way.
- 9) **Be wise:** The Talmud asks: "Who is wise?" It offers two answers. One: the person who learns from others. Two: the one who sees the consequences of their actions. Develop a strategic view. Understand cause, effect, and consequence. Fail small. Succeed big.



Cristina Martínez

Founder & CEO of Salud Holdings – UAE



Take bold decisions earlier, without overanalyzing or waiting for perfect conditions. Action creates clarity, and the sooner you step into discomfort, the faster you grow. Trust your instincts and stay unapologetically focused on your goals.

When it comes to career choices, go straight to building value through ownership and leadership, not just operational excellence. In personal growth, prioritize discipline over motivation and resilience over approval. **Be selective about the people around you.** Surround yourself with individuals who are more experienced than you and who push you to think bigger and act bolder.

One of the most powerful lessons I have learned is the importance of having great mentors. A strong mentor does not just guide you; they hold you to higher standards and accelerate your growth. In business and in life, **proximity to excellence is everything.**

Financially, take calculated risks earlier, reinvest consistently, and refuse to settle for incremental progress. **Treat your energy and mental focus as assets**, because they are. And when it comes to balance, pursue purpose and passion, which bring far more fulfillment than any rigid idea of work-life separation.

Lastly, **if fear shows up, address it head-on.** Kill it early, or it will slowly kill your ambition.



Gareth Newman

Founder & CEO of Plausible Gaming – USA



I didn't set out to build a company; I set out to solve a frustration. That's how most entrepreneurs begin, by fixing something fundamentally broken in a space they're passionate about. For me, that space was video games. As a gamer, I knew that matchmaking time, the delay in finding others to play with, was a widespread issue. The better the player, the worse the problem. Finding players of similar skill and playstyle could take hours, sometimes days.

All too often, entrepreneurs guess what their users want, whereas real success lies in listening. Six years of trial and error taught us **to listen to every complaint, late-night conversation, and social media post**. That is how we discovered a consistent signal pointing to an unmet need for belonging.

With over 3 billion people and a 200-billion-dollar industry, why were so many gamers still feeling disconnected? That became the problem we set out to solve. We built a community to bring players together. We added quantitative systems to their qualitative stories: matching mechanisms, role tags, and engagement metrics. And then we watched a new culture emerge around measured empathy. I learned that **community and data cannot be separated**.

The simple practice of listening became the primary driver of our product features. Whether it was a lack of meaningful connection, slow matchmaking, or limited tools for competitive players to learn and grow, the opportunity continued to reveal itself. Building a solution naturally evolved into a business: Plausible Gaming.

Whether you sell software, farm equipment, or consulting hours, the principle is the same. Your users are constantly explaining how to serve them better. **Build the systems to listen and let this guide innovation**. If you translate conversation into insight, and insight into process, you can scale both trust and infrastructure. That is a business with an unshakable core competency.

If I could advise my younger self: **Don't chase ideas; chase patterns of frustration in communities that care about something**. They will show you the future if you give them a structured way to express what truly matters to them.



Tjaša Jarc

Founder of Džungla Plants – Slovenia



Building a company is not a sprint but a marathon. From the very beginning, I set out a clear list of guiding principles, and that mindset has carried me through every phase of growth. The core of my advice would be to commit to steady persistence, focused effort, and incremental progress. These elements are essential for sustaining the energy needed over the long haul.

- 1) **Embracing the Marathon Mindset:** Entrepreneurship can feel like endless sprints of deadlines and launches, but lasting success comes from pacing yourself. Set realistic milestones, conserve mental and physical energy, and rest when needed. Be patient. Steady progress, not speed, builds something meaningful over time.
- 2) **Consistency Over Intensity:** Moderate, steady effort outperforms bursts of overwork. Create daily routines for development, customer engagement, and learning. Break goals into small, manageable tasks and connect new habits to existing ones. Small, consistent actions compound into major results.
- 3) **Cultivating Deep Focus:** Guard your attention like a runner maintains form. Work in focused 60-90 minute blocks, silence distractions, and pursue one clear goal at a time. Take short resets to stay sharp. Sustained focus produces your best work.
- 4) **Measured, Sustainable Growth:** Avoid chasing fast, unsustainable growth. In business, as in racing, conserving energy early ensures a stronger finish. Ship features gradually, test with small groups, and scale only once feedback supports it. When demand spikes, pause to ensure systems and people can handle the load. Bring in new team members carefully, with proper onboarding to preserve culture and cohesion. A deliberate pace prevents burnout and maintains quality at every stage.
- 5) **Managing Energy for Endurance:** Treat energy as your most valuable resource. A marathon requires managing stamina, focus, and resilience. Keep a consistent sleep schedule, take one full day off weekly, and plan downtime after intense work periods. Use short breathing exercises or meditation to reset. Even on busy days, move (walk, run, or stretch). Say no to what does not align with your mission. Protecting time and energy ensures long-term effectiveness.
- 6) **Continuous Learning and Adaptation:** Stay flexible. Business, like a marathon, always brings surprises. Use feedback from customers, data, and analytics to adjust quickly. Review performance regularly and treat every idea as an experiment. Scale what works and learn from what fails. This mindset keeps the business agile, efficient, and open to growth.
- 7) **Leveraging Community and Support:** No one runs a marathon alone. Seek mentors, ask for help, and learn from those who have gone before. Build a network that offers encouragement and honest feedback. Invest in a team grounded in shared values, open communication, and respect. The right support system makes the journey easier, stronger, and more meaningful.
- 8) **Celebrating Milestones and Preparing for the Next Leg:** Take the time to celebrate progress. Just as a marathon finish line reflects months of training, each business milestone (whether it is the first sale, a new partnership, or a successful launch) deserves recognition. These moments refill motivation, build team morale, and help refocus for the next challenge ahead.



Gašper Šetinc

Founder of RequestFX.com – Slovenia



An entrepreneur doesn't solve one problem but two. The first is creating something that truly has value. The second is convincing people to recognize that value and pay for it. Without the first, you have nothing to offer. Without the second, you have no business.

Graveyards are full of great ideas that no one knew how to sell. Not because they were bad, but because marketing cost more than the product generated. **When the cost of acquiring a customer exceeds the value that customer brings, the wheel stops turning.** And it stops fast.

That is why **margin is defined by marketing, not production.** Price is not "cost plus something extra." Price is the answer to the question: how much do you need to earn just to let the world know you exist?

You can delegate a lot. You can outsource even more. But the core, understanding how your product solves the right problem and how to bring it to the right people, cannot be handed off to anyone else. At least not without risking losing control over the fate of your company.

In the end, one question remains: Can you sell? Not just the product. But the vision. The story. The reason why anyone should care. Because an **entrepreneur who cannot market is not an entrepreneur.** They are just someone with an expensive hobby.



Natasha Marie Ahmed

Co-Founder of The Second C – UK



If I were starting my entrepreneurial journey again, armed with today's knowledge, I would remind myself of several core truths. First, fiercely guard your values and trust your intuition, even when it feels uncomfortable. True strength is not about avoiding tough conversations or keeping peace at all costs; it is about holding firm to principles like mutual respect, accountability, and leading with kindness. **Kindness is not a weakness.** It is a profound competitive advantage that cultivates psychological safety, drives collaboration, and empowers teams to deliver. And just as important, **do not hesitate to walk away** from opportunities or partnerships that do not align with those values. The short-term loss will always be outweighed by the long-term integrity, energy, and well-being you preserve.

Secondly, remember that the **operational demands of growth can quickly overwhelm you.** Prioritise building scalable foundations from the very beginning. Be confident in your decision-making, and when it is necessary to push back, trust yourself to do so. Recognise early when to seek expert support so you can focus your energy on vision, strategy, and relationship building. Your time is your most precious asset, so invest it where it yields the highest return.

Finally, **protect your well-being and nurture genuine connections.** The entrepreneurial journey is a marathon, not a sprint. Burnout serves no one. Surround yourself with a diverse, supportive network, and keep the human element at the heart of your work. Authentic relationships, shared purpose, and a thriving culture are what underpin lasting success. These are your true competitive edges.

Embrace the adventure, stay true to your purpose, and the impact will follow.



Miha Dvojmoč

Founder of Skupina Infocenter – Slovenia



I would give myself some key advice that would probably save me from many mistakes, missed opportunities, and unnecessary worries. The first piece of advice would be to **start early**. There is no need to wait for perfection, because it does not exist. You need to start, listen to the market, and adapt accordingly.

You also need to **learn to sometimes say no**. Especially at the beginning of your career, you want to please everyone and be everywhere. The consequences can be too much stress and, above all, overwork. Today, I know that entrepreneurship requires focus and that we do not always need to say yes. In connection with this, I would also point out the importance of taking time off to relax and unwind.

Experience has also taught me that **no matter how good an idea is, it has no real value without the right team**. Every success depends on the people you work with. Therefore, it is important to choose these people wisely. Honesty, reliability, and shared values are often more important than experience itself.

On my entrepreneurial journey, I learned that **we should not postpone or delay difficult decisions**. They never resolve themselves. The sooner you face and resolve them, the easier they are to carry out.

Today, I know that **failure does not mean the end, but only a new lesson in life**. We learn the most from mistakes. I would tell all young entrepreneurs at the beginning of their journeys that it will not be easy, but they should trust themselves, stay on course, and not be afraid of setbacks along the way.



Katharina Unger

Founder & CEO of LIVIN farms – Austria

LIVIN
farms

If I were to start my journey again, equipped with the knowledge and experience I have today as the founder of Livin Farms in the field of alternative proteins, I would tell myself: **Do not be afraid to be one of the first.**

When I chose to work with insects as a sustainable source of protein, the field was still uncharted. Many considered the idea unrealistic or even crazy. I learned that the strongest forces of innovation often emerge exactly where others are not yet looking. I would tell myself to **trust my vision, especially when it feels unconventional.**

I would also advise myself to **seek out supporters and team members early**, people who believe not only in the idea and in me but also in the mission. Building a company in a new sustainable industry is a marathon, not a sprint. Perseverance is essential, but without the right mentors, investors, or a dedicated team, the journey becomes twice as hard.

On a personal level, I would remind myself not to try to carry everything alone. In the early days I thought I had to manage it all (technology, strategy, sales, and communication). Today I know that **delegating is not losing control but showing trust and leadership.**

For balance, I would integrate rest from the start, recognizing it not as weakness but as a foundation for creative growth. In pioneering industries, where you constantly need to advocate for your ideas, **mental and physical health are essential for long-term success.**

And finally, I would remind myself to **stay courageous even when the path is unclear.** When you are building a new industry, you often have to be the compass yourself. The journey is the destination, and with every step you take, you place another stone. In time, the foundation you need will come together, and things will fall into place as they should.



Jure Hrvatin

Co-Founder & COO of OptiVlak | CEO at TOP Hrvatin – Slovenia



The worst decision is no decision, and even a bad decision is better than none. Bad decisions will happen, but they are not always the result of your mistakes or lack of knowledge. They often stem from the system itself and from external factors. When faced with lose-lose situations, focus on shaping future opportunities. Business fluctuations are inevitable, and sometimes a decision made in a difficult moment can be the first step toward building stronger relationships and creating new opportunities.

Strive to be fair. Success and fairness often clash, but fairness builds strong partnerships that support the growth of ideas, processes, and capacity. Fairness requires patience and collaboration. Look for alternatives to unfair partners and end cooperation with them when conditions allow. Distinguish between partners who understand circumstances and those who exploit them.

The client may be king, but you are not a subject. Pressure around quality, delivery times, and pricing will always exist, and that is understandable. What matters is the way this pressure is applied. Do not accept every criticism at any cost. It is not worth your dignity. Even kings make mistakes. Remember this when leading your own team as well.

A supplier is not your subject either. **Understand the circumstances in which a supplier faces difficulties, and work with them to find solutions.** People are often positively surprised by such an approach, and as a result they become more open and willing to share the problems and challenges they face. This creates trust and turns your supplier into a true partner.



Jodie Marie Boisvert

Founder of Change Amplifiers Research and Consulting – USA



Examine what you truly love to do and what you are naturally good at. Sometimes those two align perfectly, and if they do, you have uncovered a rare gift that can carry you far. Often they do not match right away, and that is not a dead end, it is an invitation. If you love something deeply but do not yet feel confident in your skills, that is your chance to grow, to upskill, and to invest in yourself until you become excellent at what you love. **Skills can be learned, mastery can be built, and passion provides the fuel that keeps you going when things get tough.**

When you commit to developing yourself in the direction of your passions, you set yourself up to build not just a job but a career that excites you every morning. Loving your work does more than brighten your days; it brings a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment to your life. Imagine waking up eager to contribute, to create, to lead, and to serve in ways that align with your strengths and values. That is the power of aligning love with skill.

Once you have explored and decided what kind of career you want, take bold steps to build it. That might mean applying for jobs that stretch you, pursuing new certifications, finding mentors, or even starting your own business if your vision calls for it. Every choice you make in this direction lays another brick in the foundation of the life and career you dream about. **No one else can build it for you; you are the architect of your own future.**

The courage to move towards what you love, the discipline to sharpen your abilities, and the belief that you deserve a career filled with meaning are the tools that will carry you forward. **Do not wait for the perfect moment or permission from someone else.** The moment to start is now. Build with intention, act with passion, and trust that when you combine love and skill, you create not just a career but a legacy of fulfillment.



Patrick van der Wardt

Founder & Principal Consultant of The Hotel IT Guy – Netherlands

Throughout my career, one principle has consistently made the biggest difference: **Focus on creating real value before chasing recognition**. When you put energy into solving meaningful problems for your clients, colleagues, or community, success follows naturally. I learned this early in the hospitality tech industry, where innovation only matters if it simplifies someone's day or improves a guest's experience.

Equally important are curiosity and adaptability. Technology, like life, moves fast. **Staying relevant requires the humility to keep learning** and the courage to unlearn what no longer serves you. The best decisions I've made came from asking questions others overlooked.

Lastly, **balance is not a luxury; it's a strategy**. Taking care of your health, relationships, and mental space allows you to perform at your best. I've learned to protect that balance as fiercely as any business deal, because sustainable success starts with a sustainable self.



Bernard K. Mulenda

Founder of ADA (Actions for the Development of Africa) – Democratic Republic of the Congo

If I were to start over today, I would **begin by developing a solid business plan** and then investing in selecting the right team members. After a decade and a half of entrepreneurship, I've learned that money is the least important thing you need to start a business. Most young people I meet tell me they can't start a business due to a lack of funds, but when I ask how much money they actually need, I realize they don't have a detailed business plan, let alone a clear idea of the team required for the project's success.

On the other hand, when I speak with those already active in business, I often find their growth has stalled. After analyzing their situation, I've concluded that they rarely invest in strengthening the skills of their employees, which prevents them from adapting to new market trends and realities. In short, **the success of a business depends on the quality of the project and the strength of the management team**.





Eunice Adebisi

Founder of Eunice Adebisi (Brand Clarity & Premium Sales Positioning Consultancy) – UK

eunice adebiyi
BRAND CLARITY & PREMIUM SALES
POSITIONING CONSULTANCY

If I were starting again, I'd stop trying to prove I was ready and start learning how to build properly. In the early years, I confused pace with progress. I was always moving, saying yes, reinventing, chasing opportunity, but I didn't yet understand the cost of building without capacity. **You can't make clear decisions when your calendar owns you.**

I'd tell myself to **learn the business fundamentals sooner**. To get comfortable with money conversations, with pricing properly, with reading data as often as I write copy. To understand that brand is strategy, not decoration. I'd also remind myself that growth isn't always scale. Sometimes it's systems, margins, or stronger client boundaries. The work isn't to become bigger; it's to become cleaner.

If I could do it again, I'd build slower but sharper, with more structure and less noise.

Your non-negotiables should be:

- 1) Operate from clarity, not urgency. Every rushed decision has a repayment plan.
- 2) Know your numbers. Cash flow, margin, conversion. If you can't see it, you can't steer it.
- 3) Build systems early. Freedom doesn't come from flexibility, it comes from infrastructure.
- 4) Be selective. The right clients keep your energy high and your reputation higher.
- 5) Keep learning the business side. Emotional intelligence matters, but commercial intelligence sustains it.



Yvonne (Yves) Lobo

Founder of Coffee Meet up with Yves – UAE



If I were starting my journey again, I would tell myself to **trust the timing of everything**: the people, the pauses, and the process. Every detour I once resisted turned out to guide me exactly where I was meant to be.

In business and in life, **alignment matters more than speed**. In the beginning, it is easy to say yes to everything, every idea, every opportunity, until you realize that not everything that shines is meant for you. The most meaningful growth happens when your work aligns with your values and your energy flows toward what truly feels right.

Remember that **kindness is not a weakness**; it is your superpower. Building relationships from the heart opens more doors than any strategy ever could. Success built on authenticity and empathy lasts longer, feels lighter, and creates real impact.

Do not rush the becoming. Growth is not linear, and consistency, not perfection, creates magic. Some of the most beautiful communities and collaborations are born from simply showing up, even when no one else does.

And **never dim your light to fit in**. Your uniqueness is your gift to the world. When you lead with purpose, stay grounded in gratitude, and keep your heart open, everything meant for you will find its way to you in divine timing.



Mitja Pavlič

Founder & CEO of Virtual IT | Founder of Antivirusi.eu – Slovenia



I began my entrepreneurial journey as a teenager, an early start that gave me both challenges and lasting advantages. Learning through real experiences helped me build a strong foundation and shape my entrepreneurial philosophy. What started as a hobby became a business that still brings me purpose and profit today. Starting a business is not easier now, but the path to success can be faster with the internet, social media, and artificial intelligence.

- 1) **Be bold and innovative:** Act differently than the majority. Entrepreneurship is no longer about following established paths. The world and markets are constantly changing, and only those who adapt quickly remain competitive. If something doesn't work, change direction and view each shift as an opportunity for growth.
- 2) **Listen to people with experience, especially those who openly share their mistakes and failures:** These stories are the most valuable learning tools, helping you avoid repeating errors or respond more effectively when similar situations arise. Learning from mistakes, your own or others', builds resilience.
- 3) **Do not seek idols:** Even the greatest can disappoint you. Be your own role model. Instead of imitating others, focus on self-reflection and personal growth. This is the path to authenticity and long-term success.
- 4) **Follow and leverage current trends:** We live in an era of rapid advances in artificial intelligence, which can support everything from gathering information and conducting market research to automating tasks, preparing projects, translating, analyzing data, and predicting outcomes. Those who recognize AI's potential and integrate it wisely into their workflows will hold a major advantage.
- 5) **Rely on persistence, passion, and vision:** Entrepreneurship is never easy; challenges are constant. Persistence keeps you moving, passion gives meaning, and vision provides energy. Success today is not only about numbers—it is about creating value, innovating, and building trust. True success comes from the impact, purpose, and legacy you leave behind.
- 6) **Build your personal brand:** In today's world, an individual's visibility and credibility often matter more than the company they represent. Companies may come and go, but your personal brand endures. At the same time, continually expand your network. Don't rely only on existing contacts—your network is your wealth.

And what do I consider the key to success? Honesty, perseverance, and positive thinking. The biggest enemies in business? Naivety and excessive ego.



Tijana Naprta

Founder & COO of Tridesetri – Serbia



If I could give one piece of advice to someone starting their entrepreneurial journey, it would be this: **Don't be afraid to evolve.**

Your first idea won't be your last, and **who you are when you start won't be who you need to be to succeed.** You'll outgrow your comfort zones, your mindset, and sometimes even the people around you. That is progress. The ability to keep learning, to adapt, and to stay curious will take you further than any single skill you start with.

At the beginning, it's easy to believe you need to have everything figured out: the perfect plan, the perfect timing. You don't. What matters is that you begin, even when you're uncertain. **Most growth happens while you're doing,** not while you're planning.

You'll make mistakes. You'll take risks that don't pay off. People will doubt you. Sometimes, you'll doubt yourself. **Learn to separate feedback from judgment.** Criticism can hurt, but it's also a shortcut to becoming better. Let it shape you, not break you.

Take care of yourself in the process. Ambition is powerful, but it's meaningless if you burn out before you get there. Protect your time, your energy, and your relationships. **Entrepreneurship should expand your life, not consume it.**

And finally, **stay grounded in curiosity.** Keep asking questions, keep building, keep exploring what feels slightly out of reach. The goal isn't to be perfect; it's to keep growing into someone capable of handling bigger challenges with clarity and calm. That's what real success feels like.



Ben Galler

Co-Founder of 1182 Music – Switzerland

ELEVEN 11811 EIGHTYTWO

- 1) **Don't put all your eggs in one basket:** If that one basket fails, whether it is a job, investment, or even a person, you can lose everything. Instead, spread your investments, build multiple skill sets, and cultivate several relationships or income streams. Flexibility and redundancy provide protection against unforeseen events and create more opportunities for growth.
- 2) **Work-life balance is widely misunderstood:** Balance does not always mean 50/50. It means having the freedom and well-being to be fully present where you are, whether at work or at home. Sometimes investing more in work is necessary and fulfilling; other times life demands your attention.
- 3) **Avoid settings where your skills are not valued:** Your time, effort, and expertise are finite resources. If you find yourself in an environment, whether a job, organization, or group, where your contributions are overlooked, undervalued, or dismissed, your growth will stagnate. Recognition is not about ego; it is about ensuring your potential is nurtured.
- 4) **Refraining from actions is often more important than operating:** Action is often glorified: doing more, moving fast, staying busy. Knowing when not to act, when to avoid confrontation, resist the urge to retaliate, or say no to tempting but unwise opportunities, shows maturity and control. Some of the biggest failures come not from inaction, but from impulsive or poorly considered moves.



Reina Hallab

Founder of Raw Healing & SELF Mastery Framework – Canada

Believe in yourself fully, endlessly, and with every breath. Every challenge is an initiation, every fall a sacred invitation to rise stronger, softer, and wiser.

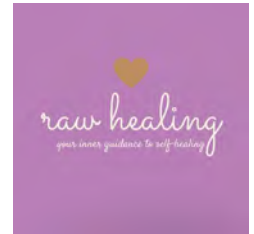
You will live moments that shake the ground beneath your feet, three brain surgeries, heart-opening experiences that crack you wide open to self-love, and times when silence expands into sacred reflection. Through it all, life will flow through you, reminding you that **you are held, guided, and never alone.**

Resilience moves through your rhythm. Trust lights your compass. Authenticity shapes your power. **Speak your truth with grace**, let your soul lead, and embody the light that you are. The world receives healing through the vibration of your voice, the presence of your love, and the courage of your becoming.

Each experience unfolds as a divine sculptor, shaping you into a vessel of love, wisdom, and leadership. **Every turn guides you closer to your essence**, revealing freedom in its purest form, Soul Empowerment in motion.

Keep walking, keep trusting, keep creating. You are here to remind humanity that **healing flows through presence**, and that when the woman heals, the world heals.

You are unstoppable, and life moves through you, opening every path meant for your soul to shine.





Kiranjit Singh Pannu

Founder & Managing Director of JSP Educonsultants – India



In my three-decade journey across the Indian Navy, corporate leadership, and entrepreneurship, the most powerful lesson has been the importance of adaptability with integrity. Careers, markets, and personal circumstances are never linear; they evolve in unexpected ways. I have learned to **treat challenges not as setbacks but as opportunities to recalibrate, grow, and uncover new strengths.**

At every stage, whether leading thousands in uniform, steering large school groups as CEO, or building my own ventures, relationships have been the cornerstone. **Surround yourself with people who share your values and inspire you to rise higher.** Listen deeply, build trust, and never underestimate the compounding effect of kindness.

Equally important is balance. There will always be another meeting, another deal, and another ambition, but **your health, family, and inner peace are non-negotiable.** Protect them.

Entrepreneurship is less about reaching a final destination and more about sustaining the courage to **walk the path with clarity, humility, and resilience.**



Cinzia Tedeschi

Co-Founder of Smartrenovation – UAE



The first and most important advice I would give myself is to **be ready for the moment**. There will always come a point, the fatal moment as I like to call it, when you feel like giving up, when your patience runs out, when you believe you are not capable enough, or when time feels too short. Those moments define you far more than the easy ones. I would tell myself to expect them, to accept that they will happen, and to meet them with calm rather than fear.

In life, no matter how much we plan or prepare, there are moments of exhaustion, doubt, and frustration. It is not the presence of these moments that determines your success, but how you respond to them. Back then, I often thought strength meant never feeling weak or uncertain. Now I know that strength is the ability to continue even when you do feel uncertain. So my first advice would be: **Accept your humanity**. You will make mistakes, lose patience, and question yourself, but none of these moments define your worth. What defines you is your willingness to stand up again, to think clearly, and to keep going despite the weight of your doubts.

The second piece of advice I would give myself is about mindset and attitude. **Your thoughts shape your reality** more than any external event ever will. If you think of challenges as barriers, you will stop at them. But if you think of them as opportunities to grow, they become part of your evolution. When I look back, I realize that every challenge I faced was a hidden form of preparation. Each obstacle taught me something I could not have learned from success alone.

I would remind myself that patience, perspective, and inner calm are not signs of passivity; they are marks of maturity. When things do not go as planned, your attitude determines the outcome more than the situation itself. You cannot always control circumstances, but you can always control your reaction. So I would tell my younger self: **Train your mind before you chase your goals**, because how you think determines how you live.

Another important lesson I have learned is the power of identity. You cannot become what you do not first believe yourself to be. If you want to be strong, confident, or successful, you must start thinking like that person right now. **Your actions will eventually align with your beliefs**. I would tell myself to always be that person in my mind, to visualize who I want to be and to act as if I am already on that path. The world often mirrors the image you hold of yourself. When you see yourself as capable and worthy, you attract opportunities that align with that belief.



Silvio Perpmer

Founder of Eliah Sahil Organic Care – Austria



- 1) **See failure as a teacher:** Have no fear of failure. Failure is not the end; it is part of the process. Every stumble and every setback is a lesson in disguise, a stepping stone toward growth. Do not let the fear of falling stop you from taking the first step.
- 2) **Resilience means rising:** Get back up when you fall, and keep trusting the journey. Resilience is not about never falling, it is about always rising. Each time you get back up, you prove to yourself that you are stronger than your doubts. Trust that the journey, with all its ups and downs, is unfolding exactly as it should.
- 3) **Focus on the journey, not just the goal:** Have faith in your path and keep your eyes on the journey rather than the end goal. The destination matters, but the road you walk is what truly transforms you. When you focus on each moment, each challenge, and each joy, you begin to realize that the path itself is the reward.
- 4) **Live fully through experiences:** Life is here to be lived; it is the experiences along the way that shape who you are. You are not defined by a single success or failure, but by how deeply you engage with life as it happens. Laugh loudly, cry when you need to, take chances, and stay open. These are the moments that mold your story, your character, your soul.



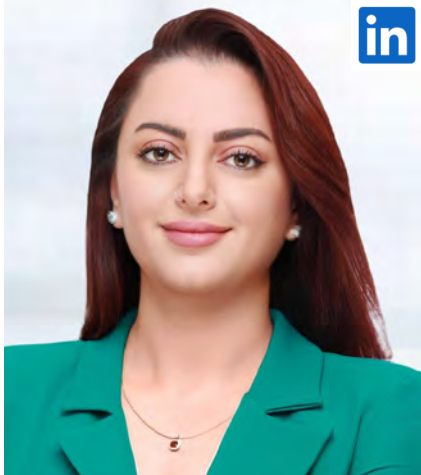
Clara Maspons

Co-Founder of Maternia Health – Belgium



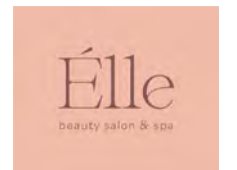
Don't underestimate the power of a solid support system. **Surround yourself with people who genuinely root for you:** mentors, peers, friends, and family. They will offer guidance you didn't know you needed, open doors you didn't know existed, keep you grounded when things get messy, and give you emotional strength when the path gets rough. A support system built on reciprocity becomes one of your greatest assets. It reminds you that change is never something you create alone; your journey is made stronger by the people who walk it with you.

Early on, many of us fall into the trap of thinking we have to do everything ourselves to prove we are capable. **A lot of that pressure doesn't come from the work itself, but from the stories we have absorbed,** stories about how strength looks, about not asking for too much, and about what it means to succeed. We are taught to value self reliance, to push through quietly, to show we can "handle it." But my truth is that entrepreneurship will ask you to unlearn those habits. Be ready to embrace that shift, because it will often, sometimes uncomfortably, reveal where your assumptions and habits were holding you back, and help you make clearer choices, trust your instincts, and evaluate opportunities with sharper judgment.



Walaa Said

Co-Founder of Velvet Corner and Elle Beauty Salon & Spa – UAE



First, **trust your instincts, but validate them with data.** Passion is powerful, but strategy turns dreams into sustainable businesses.

Second, **don't try to do everything alone.** The right team, even if small, is worth more than a thousand solo hours. Delegation is not a weakness; it is a leadership skill.

And finally, **build the brand before the product.** I have learned that people don't just buy what you sell. They buy who you are, what you represent, and how you make them feel.

Every mistake I made taught me more than any success ever did. So my advice would be: **Fail smart, pivot fast, and always show up with grace and grit.**



Andrej Bantulić

Co-Founder & CEO of Vavilon – Serbia



So, you think you've got the idea and you're ready to build your own startup, sell it for tens or even hundreds of millions, and retire on the Amalfi Coast sipping Aperol Spritz after lunch. As dreamy as that sounds, it's actually possible, but **you have to start now**. The perfect product won't be built from your living room sofa.

So, what are the steps? First, **you need a team**. They should meet two criteria: you must trust them, and they must be a little crazy. Crazy? Yes. They should be willing to step out of their comfort zone, put in the hours, sweat and tears, and deliver under insane pressure, all with passion and a big smile.

How do you know if your idea is a good one? Simple: Ask your potential customers. Lots of them. As many as possible. What do you ask, and why? You need to discover three key things: Do they actually need your product, or is it just a fun toy? How big is the market, and can you realistically make money? And are they willing to pay for your product or service? You may pivot your idea several times, but in the end you should **land on a product that is built to sell**.

Right now, most startups are B2B SaaS, and for good reason. Businesses have much bigger budgets than the average consumer, and software products are getting cheaper and easier to build. AI tools are essential here, whether you need them for sales, product development, or engineering.

If you're working on a physical product, like we are, you may need to raise money early on for research and development. The best approach is to chase grants, which are equity-free. The downside? Competition is fierce, and the applications are long, detailed, and not exactly fun to write.

If you've completed these steps and gained traction, congratulations! You're officially a startup founder. **Now comes the hardest part: Scaling**. But that's a topic for another time.



Armina Rosenberg

Co-Founder & Co-Portfolio Manager of Minotaur Capital – Australia



MINOTAUR

1) **Conviction and resilience matter more than permission:** When you are trying to do something new, whether it is building a differentiated investment firm or balancing entrepreneurship with family life, there will always be voices telling you not to do it because it is too hard or too competitive. You do not need universal approval to start. In fact, you will never receive it. What you need is clarity of purpose and the right people around you. My co-founder, our early team, and our supportive investors made the difference between an idea and a thriving business. You have to back yourself, even when the path looks unconventional.

2) **Do not let surprises set you back, let them shape you:** Life rarely unfolds according to plan, and often the biggest breakthroughs come in moments of disruption. I launched Minotaur Capital, a global equities fund built at the intersection of AI and investing, and at the same time had my second baby. That was never in the business plan, and many people told me it would be too much. What I learned is that you cannot wait for the perfect moment, because it does not exist. You build as you go, and you grow stronger in the process.

3) **Be deliberate about building the right team and community around you:** Innovation is never a solo act. Having a co-founder with complementary skills, early employees who believe in the mission, and investors who share the vision is what makes the impossible possible.

Looking back, I would remind myself that challenges such as slow fundraising, compliance hurdles, and sleepless nights with a newborn are not setbacks at all, they are the forge. They sharpen your edge, clarify your priorities, and force you to innovate. And if you **keep sight of the bigger mission**, which for me is transforming how capital is managed and who gets to manage it, then the rest becomes noise.



Jan Habat

Co-Founder of FRESH 32 – Slovenia

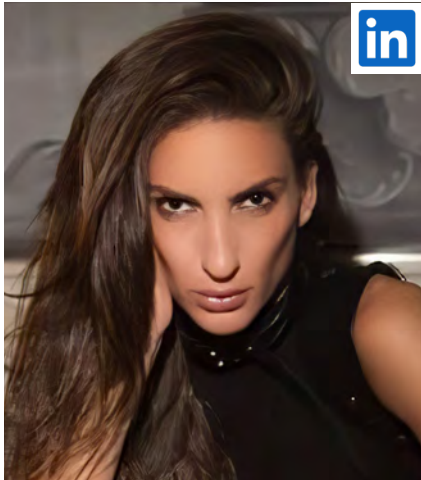


If I could start my entrepreneurial journey again, with all the knowledge and experience I have today, my first piece of advice to myself would be to **be patient**. Entrepreneurship is not a sprint but a marathon, where mistakes are part of the process and each one carries a lesson. In the past, I often wanted results immediately, but today I know that perseverance is what, in the long run, separates successful stories from short-lived attempts.

My second advice would be to **surround yourself with people who are better than you**. I learned early on that the real strength of a company does not come only from the idea but from the team that knows how to execute it. Today, I dedicate much more time to building a culture of collaboration, trust, and accountability. These are the foundations on which you can grow globally.

The third advice would be to **listen less to the noise and more to intuition**. In entrepreneurship, there are always thousands of opinions, but the right decision is often the one that aligns with your vision, not with the expectations of others. I have learned to trust my gut and make decisions quickly, even when all the information is not available.

Finally, I would remind myself to **stay courageous even when things do not go as planned**. Entrepreneurship teaches humility, resilience, and continuous learning. Today, I know that failure is not the end of the road but a signal to adjust the direction, and that every step, even the hard ones, builds the foundation for future success.



Karen El Khazen

Founder of Karen K Sanctuaries – UAE



Never stop evolving, and never see reinvention as a risk. It's your greatest strategy. Everything we see in the world already exists. Every product, concept, or idea is a remix of something that came before. The magic lies in how you see it, shape it by adding your unique twist, and most importantly, deliver it in a way that feels unmistakably your own. The biggest competitive edge you can ever have is your perspective. And that's something you refine only by living fully, failing often, and daring to start over.

When I transitioned from fashion to business, I realized that **entrepreneurship isn't an industry; it's a mindset.** The world no longer rewards one-dimensional thinking, and multiple income streams aren't a luxury, they're a necessity. True entrepreneurs read patterns, connect dots between industries, and create through the cracks because that's where the light shines. Each industry carries its own logic and rhythm, but when you learn to see the patterns that link them, you can create value in the spaces others overlook. The ability to crack the matrix codes between industries is where innovation and opportunity live.

If there's one truth I've learned, it's that success isn't about being first; it's about being different. **Don't chase trends, set your own rhythm.** Keep improving, stay curious, and understand that your next breakthrough is rarely ever in a straight line; it's usually hiding in a new perspective.

My journey has been one of continuous reinvention, not by accident but by design. It has taught me that innovation isn't about invention; it's about perception, execution, and the courage to see familiar things differently. Growth is never linear, and **your career choices should mirror your evolution,** not your comfort. Through each chapter, a new muscle builds: discipline, leadership, empathy, and strategy. Surround yourself with energy that fuels you, not noise that drains you, because burnout doesn't come from working too much, it comes from misalignment between your actions and your values. This taught me to merge imagination with precision.

Lastly, to my younger self and to every young entrepreneur: **Don't chase linear progress.** The most rewarding careers are built in curves, through experimentation, learning, and pivots that don't always make sense in the moment. Trust that your curiosity will connect the dots later. You'll change paths many times, and that's not failure, that's growth. You'll build, lose, and rebuild stronger. Each new beginning is not zero, it's experience compounded. Study the markets, trust your intuition, and most importantly, learn the rules so you can master them, and then break them. That's where innovation, opportunity, and true success live.



Shannon Dobbs

Founder of Fellowship of Living Systems – USA



If I could start over, I wouldn't change the path. Your failures and detours are your real education. I would only document the journey better and connect with other edge-runners sooner. The conventional entrepreneurship playbook doesn't apply to systems-change work, and systems change is what the world needs most.

- 1) **Embrace Edge Experience as Your Competitive Advantage:** Every unconventional experience builds unique insight. Resourcefulness, coalition-building, navigating broken systems, and facing real hardship become your strategic edge. Do not try to fit the traditional entrepreneur mold. Your lived experience is your innovation engine.
- 2) **Build Businesses That Solve Problems You've Actually Lived:** Authentic solutions come from firsthand experience. The struggles you've faced give you empathy and clarity that theory cannot. Build from what you know deeply. If you have lived the problem, you are best positioned to solve it.
- 3) **Implementation Beats Permission Every Time:** Too many entrepreneurs waste years waiting for approval or funding. I learned to make things work with whatever was available. Start building solutions with what you have instead of waiting for ideal conditions that may never come.
- 4) **Find the Gaps Between Systems, Don't Fight the Systems:** Traditional entrepreneurs often try to disrupt entire industries. I learned to look for jurisdictional gaps and regulatory blind spots, the places where systems fail to serve. Focus on unmet needs the system overlooks, not just what experts say is missing.
- 5) **Build Coalitions, Not Just Customers:** Most business advice focuses on individual customers. My path showed the value of creating impact across ecosystems of stakeholders. When your model benefits multiple groups at once, you build resilience that lasts.
- 6) **Revenue Is a Tool, Not the Goal:** Entrepreneurship often gets reduced to profit extraction. I discovered business models can be vehicles for community building. Design for shared ownership and wealth circulation, not just personal enrichment.
- 7) **Institutional Resistance Is Market Validation:** When established players resisted my solutions, I realized it meant I was onto something disruptive. Don't waste time convincing gatekeepers; build alternatives that make their approval irrelevant.
- 8) **Document Everything for Others to Replicate:** My biggest successes were never just personal wins; they became proof-of-concept for new approaches others could follow. Build with replication in mind from the beginning, not as an afterthought.
- 9) **Your "Accidental" Journey Is Strategic Pattern Recognition:** Time and again, I found opportunities where others saw problems. I built solutions that addressed root causes, not surface symptoms. Trust your pattern recognition, even when you can't yet see the full strategy.
- 10) **The Mess Is the Method:** If I had cleaned up my path, I would have erased the experiences that made me effective. Embrace the chaos, because breakthrough innovation comes from navigating complexity, not avoiding it.



Lee Marie Jacobs

Founder of Spirituelle Society – Canada



Most importantly, remember that your most profound legacy is to **enjoy the journey and to explore yourself** as you embark on your entrepreneurial path. Many entrepreneurs focus too much on the destination, the title, or the end goal, and completely miss the gifts of the day. **Stay true and authentic** to yourself as you grow your business, and learn to develop great strength while keeping a beautiful and open heart. Kindness and compassion must be talked about more in business as we work together to elevate humanity.

When it comes to building your business, creating a thriving community is deeply important, as is setting up strong systems. Without systems, the revenue and growth of your business will be limited. **Always lift others up and mentor those around you** to live and work in excellence daily.

Choose your income streams mindfully. Making money is important, but how you make it is what brings deep happiness and fulfillment. I mentor clients to aim for ten income streams in their businesses so they are not overly dependent on just one, such as a single product or service. At least one of these income streams should be passive, providing recurring revenue.

Always ask yourself: Am I, and is my business, making this world a better and brighter place? The answer must be yes.



Matteo Foïs

Founder of TAM Acceleration – USA



The most impactful advice that defined my career came from the collision of my two different worlds. I did not start in tech or sales. I graduated with a law degree in Italy. My world was built on rules, precedent, and a meticulous, structured process. It was about mitigating risk and operating within a well-defined system.

Then I jumped into the world of B2B go-to-market, and it was the complete opposite. It was chaos. The prevailing wisdom was all about brute force: more calls, more emails, more hours. It felt like everyone was just running faster on a hamster wheel, celebrating activity itself rather than the results. I tried to apply my structured, logical mindset to a world that seemed to thrive on inefficiency, and it was incredibly frustrating.

The breakthrough came when I was working in corporate and stopped trying to be a better operator within that broken system. Instead, I started looking at the problem as if I were analyzing a complex case. The realization was simple but transformative: **Stop being the engine and start building the engine.**

My legal training taught me to build an airtight argument from first principles. I realized I could apply that same thinking to sales. Instead of just “doing outreach,” I could engineer a system, a GTM asset, that would predictably generate pipeline. The goal was not to be the person sending a thousand emails; it was to be the architect of the machine that could send a million, personalized, unique, and relevant. This is the entire philosophy behind TAM Acceleration.

This mindset applies to everything. It is the difference between arguing a single case and building a law firm. It is the difference between being a freelancer and building a company.

So my advice is this: look at any area of your life where you feel you are putting in more hours without gaining more leverage. Ask yourself, “Am I just operating within the existing rules, or am I coordinating the system from above?” The moment you shift your identity from operator to architect is the moment you unlock real freedom and create truly scalable impact.



Jo Spencer

Founder & CEO of Jo Spencer Consulting – UK, UAE



- 1) **Don't be afraid to fail:** I failed in business many years ago. It felt devastating at the time, but it proved to be a springboard to something better.
- 2) **Don't dwell on the bad days.** There will be plenty of them. Running a business has given me the biggest highs, but also the biggest lows. Learning to deal with the latter takes practice.
- 3) **Learn from others:** At Jo Spencer Consulting, we help highly accomplished entrepreneurs secure Knighthoods, Damehoods, CBEs, OBEs, and MBEs through the British Honours system. These awards are international and can be presented to anyone in the world, regardless of nationality. My client list is the 1% of the 1%, and I have worked with hundreds of clients. I have learned something from every single one. A number have given me brilliant advice, and others have become informal mentors. I am deeply grateful to learn from those far more successful than me, and I always listen to any advice they give.
- 4) **Celebrate the wins:** A client once told me that if your day is going too well, something is wrong. While I recognise that firefighting is part of the entrepreneurial journey, I also believe it is important to celebrate the wins, no matter how small.



Skip Hulsey

Founder of Lagom Development – USA



Do not wait for a seat at the table; build your own table. The world is on fire, and it will take people who refuse to wait to radically reshape it. No one is coming to save you. Not the perfect mentor, not a silver bullet, not an invitation to the big leagues. The truth is, you already have the ideas in your head that can change your life, and possibly the lives of thousands of others. That spark is yours. Protect it. Feed it.

If I could speak to my 20-year-old self, I would say this: **Wake up. Find a problem you cannot stop thinking about. Fall in love with the solution. Then execute relentlessly.** Every step will not be clear at the start, but that is the magic. Resources, people, and unexpected opportunities show up once you commit and start speaking your vision out loud. It will not be easy, but it will be worth it.

Each day you wait, the world gets a little dimmer without your light. I am 40 now, and I am proud to say that I am building things I love. You can too. Start today.



Marcel Dover

Co-Founder of Lime Booking – Slovenia



Do not wait until everything feels perfect; get your assumptions out into the real world as soon as possible. Talk to potential customers before you build anything. Interview them, understand their pain points, and validate whether your solution actually solves a real problem.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned is how crucial it is to **define your niche early on.** Do not try to serve everyone; instead, find a specific market segment where your value proposition resonates the most. Once you have identified that niche, focus all your efforts there and scale as efficiently as possible. Early focus allows you to build better products, craft sharper marketing messages, and create stronger word-of-mouth growth. **Do not be afraid to go narrow.** Scaling within a niche can lead to greater long-term success than trying to appeal to everyone from the start.



Missy Maceyko

Co-Founder & Head of Research and Insights of Willing Observers – USA

I took what looked like many “detours” on my educational and career journey, pursuing several degrees and career opportunities that didn’t, as I hoped, result in permanence. Like so many young people in the United States, I had been socialized into the idea that career success equated to a coherent and linear pathway, landing the job right out of college and staying there for life. As a young person, I was not fully aware of the systemic changes that have made that kind of “success” less of a possibility for many, in the United States and beyond.

I have an extremely supportive spouse, someone who has consistently reminded me of the realities of the global economy and who has encouraged me. All of these “detours” have created new networks, skill sets, and experiences that are meaningful, personally and professionally, and strengthened my resolve to create new pathways. However, in the moment, it is hard to feel as if a detour is anything other than a waste of time and energy, especially in times when financial insecurity is looming.

If I were starting my journey again, I would tell myself to believe my spouse’s words more easily, and would remind myself more regularly that **having a meandering path is never a waste of time, it is always an asset**. New and diverse experiences, connections, and skill sets always create more room for innovation and fulfillment. And figuring out what isn’t working, or what you don’t want to do, truly helps sharpen your focus on the things that you really want to pursue in life.





Dragana Jovčić

Co-Founder & CEO of Uradi-zaradi – Serbia



If I were starting again, I would gently remind myself that **building a business is not just about chasing growth**; it is about creating real, lasting value for people, especially for those whose voices are often overlooked or underestimated.

What I have learned is that the **most powerful impact often begins with deep listening**: listening without assumptions, showing up for your community, and co-creating solutions at their pace, not yours. Some of the most meaningful work I have done, particularly empowering women through grassroots initiatives, started not in boardrooms but in kitchens, in informal conversations, or at community gatherings where trust was built slowly and sincerely.

You do not need to have everything figured out. But you do need courage, the kind that allows you to be vulnerable, to admit what you do not know, and to keep learning in public. **Growth will follow when you lead with purpose, not ego.**

Start small and stay close to the people you serve. Run tiny pilot projects. Host a workshop. Launch a micro crowdfunding campaign. Test an idea even if it is not perfect. Every time you show up and invite feedback, you gain clarity. Every hiccup is a lesson. Every step forward makes the next one easier.

And finally, **protect your energy.** It is your most precious resource. Spend it with people who do not just share your vision but also your values. That is how you build something that lasts, not just a business but a movement rooted in authenticity, empathy, and meaningful impact.



Mohiit Verrma

Founder of Biomass Energeons India – India



Build something that serves a larger purpose, and the rest will follow: clarity, resilience, and eventually, success. This advice helped shape my career choices. Instead of chasing traditional metrics of success, I chose to focus on long-term societal impact. It allowed me to remain grounded when facing uncertainty and helped me reframe sacrifices not as losses but as investments in a better future for both people and planet. It also influenced my personal growth and financial decisions. I learned to live lean, value trust over transactions, and stay committed even when the returns were not immediate. It taught me patience in relationships and empathy in leadership. Social causes like clean energy access, reducing agricultural waste, and creating green jobs in rural areas remain the soul of my work. And every step, even the hard ones, feels worth it because the purpose is bigger than me.

Be patient with your purpose, trust the long road, and protect your peace along the way. When I started Biomass Energeons India, it was with a clear intent: to give back to society by solving real problems around agricultural waste, clean energy, and rural livelihoods. But I entered an unorganised sector that demanded more than just passion. It required sacrifices, financially, emotionally, and relationally. I learned quickly that vision alone is not enough. You need resilience, clarity, and unwavering belief in your mission, especially when external validation is absent.

If I could speak to my younger self, I would say:

- 1) **You do not have to rush.** Meaningful work takes time to take root. The world may celebrate quick wins, but deep impact is built in silence and struggle.
- 2) **People will not always understand your journey, and that is okay.** Not everyone will see the bigger picture you hold in your heart. Stay kind, but do not let doubt seep in.
- 3) **Take care of your relationships and your well-being.** In chasing purpose, do not forget the people who stand by you. And do not neglect your own health, mental, physical, and emotional. Purpose cannot flourish in burnout.
- 4) **Trust people, but trust your gut more.** Especially in an unorganised space, integrity must be your compass. Not every deal is worth the price of peace.
- 5) **Celebrate the small wins.** In impact-driven work, milestones are quiet. A farmer's extra income, a cleaner village, a successful training program, these moments matter. They are your true ROI.

Most importantly, I would remind myself that **success is not just about what you build, but how you grow in the process.** Today, I stand stronger not because everything went right, but because I kept going when things went wrong. I still believe that if your work serves a larger purpose, the rest will follow: clarity, resilience, and eventually, meaningful success.



Annabel John

Founder & CEO of NOBARRIERSGROWTH – UK



One thing I've learned in business is that even if nobody understands what you're building or doesn't see the potential in your market, don't let that stop you from starting. You don't need anyone's permission or a VC's validation telling you a market is too saturated or not big enough. Remember, we're all human. What we often view as expert advice isn't always correct. I've seen this time and time again; companies that everyone doubted ended up proving everyone wrong years later. So, **tune out the noise and just start**. Pivot when you need to. Make mistakes. Learn. That's how real progress happens. There honestly is no secret to success.

When I launched my first company, I was told I was too late to the market, only for us to sell out within the first week and secure retail partnerships just months later. The same retailers that stocked my competitors ended up reaching out to work with us. That's why I always say, "just start." You honestly never know what could happen.

Get online. Even if you're not a fan of social media, your business needs that exposure. I learned this from my first company when I didn't utilize social media enough. So, when I started my second company, I made sure to change that, and the results have been phenomenal. We're living in a very different era. **People want information fast**. They want to know who the owner is, the story behind the brand, and the people behind the business. Consumers now crave relatability, and that's exactly why social media is a must for your business.

I've seen a wave of startups now making social media a key part of their go-to-market (GTM) strategy. It's no longer optional; it's how you build trust and visibility from day one. We built a community of over 56,000 engaged followers across social platforms organically, simply by speaking to our audience. B2B is often very textbook and corporate, so we decided to do things differently. We made it fun, relatable, and human, and that's what really connected with people.



Mercy Guzmán

Founder of The Visual Corner – Spain

thevisualcorner

Your relationship with money will make or break your business, not your design skills. I spent years perfecting my craft, believing that being excellent at branding and design would automatically bring success. And while my skills improved every year, my income stayed the same. Why? Because deep down, I did not believe I deserved more.

The real breakthrough came when I started working on my mindset. Those quiet thoughts that whispered “you are too expensive” or “who are you to charge premium rates?” held me back more than any lack of skill. Once I began shifting those beliefs, everything changed.

Through my branding and design work, I discovered something powerful: when clients align their business with who they truly are, they begin charging what they are worth too. A brand that reflects your authentic self naturally attracts people who value what you do. Now I work with clients who no longer apologize for their success or ask permission to shine. They know their worth, and their brands reflect that confidence.

What I have learned is this: **The work you do on yourself always shows up in the work you do for others.** When you stop hiding behind “humble” pricing and start honoring your true value, you give everyone around you permission to do the same. That is how real change happens.



Özer Bilgin

Founder of Flex Motion Technologies | Director at Nihat Consulting – Australia



NIHAT
CONSULTING

- 1) **Work hard, but do not expect work-life balance early on:** In the early stages of building something, work-life balance is a myth. Sacrifices will be necessary because building something worthwhile takes time. Rome was not built in a day, and neither is a startup. Be prepared for sleepless nights, but remember the importance of pushing through while maintaining your focus.
- 2) **Dig deeper than surface-level understanding:** You need to truly understand every aspect of what you are building, including your industry, product, and customers. Skimming the surface will set you up for failure. Take the time to learn, test, and iterate until you understand the full scope of the problem you are solving.
- 3) **Choose your co-founders and investors wisely:** Do not rush these decisions. These are the people who can make or break your startup. Skill sets and willingness matter, but what is even more important is whether they share your vision, have personalities you can work with, and can be trusted to build alongside you. These relationships will shape your journey, so be intentional.
- 4) **Expect and embrace pivots:** You will hit brick walls, guaranteed. What I wish I had known earlier is when it is time to pivot and when determination is required. Most startups completely change from their initial ideas by the time they reach the market.



Žana Kukanja

Founder & CEO of SiMO Experience – Slovenia



If I could give advice to myself at the very beginning of my entrepreneurial journey, with all the knowledge and experience I carry today, I would say:

- 1) **Gain work experience before starting your own business.** If I could do it again, I would first spend more time gaining work experience in different companies. That way you develop diverse skills, build a wider network, and don't have to learn everything by yourself, as it was pretty much my case since I had only volunteer experiences during my studies. I believe you feel much more secure and confident when you have more experience before starting your entrepreneurial journey.
- 2) **Remember that every person is just a person playing a professional role.** Most of them are far more approachable and willing to help than you think.
- 3) **Trust the process, but don't rush it.** Success doesn't come overnight. Consistency and patience are your superpowers.
- 4) **You don't have to do everything on your own.** Build a network of supportive, inspiring individuals who share values similar to yours and your company's.
- 5) **And finally, take care of yourself as much as you take care of your business.** Rest, balance, and joy are not luxuries. They are fuel. A thriving business starts with a thriving you.



Andrzej Mazur

Founder of Enclave Games – Poland



ENCLAVE
GAMES

- 1) **Be patient:** Do not rush to make something big right away. Take your time to learn, experiment, and grow. Shortcuts might get you attention, but they rarely build lasting skills or projects.
- 2) **Stop chasing perfection:** You will never finish a game if you are always polishing. Release small things, iterate, and move on. You will learn more from completing five simple games than from endlessly tweaking one perfect game and never releasing it.
- 3) **Consistency is more valuable than intensity:** Making a little progress regularly is better than long bursts followed by burnout. You do not need to reinvent the wheel with every new game. Build on what you know, reuse your tools, and focus on finishing.
- 4) **Try to embrace failure:** Every jam entry that did not place well is still a step forward. You are building experience, even when it does not feel like it. Start small, finish often, and keep pushing. That is how you will grow.



Filip Gligorević

Co-Founder of WiFeed – Serbia

WiFeed

If I could give myself one piece of advice when starting my journey, I would tell myself to **always focus on progress rather than perfection.**

In the beginning, I spent too much time trying to make everything flawless, every project, every decision, every plan. But perfection often slows you down and keeps you from actually moving forward. What matters most is taking the first step, learning along the way, and improving as you go. Once I understood that, I became more productive, more creative, and progressed faster.

So my advice is simple: **Aim for progress, not perfection, and let experience shape the rest.**



Jacki Brown

Founder & CEO of Jacki Brown Marketing – USA

**JACKI
BROWN
MARKETING**

Treat your business as your very first client. In some ways, I did this: I built my positioning, packaging, pricing, and website before I launched. But I should have approached my marketing with the same discipline. That means developing a clear content strategy, defining content pillars, and committing to the right channels, in my case LinkedIn, and then bringing all of that to life in a consistent way.

Looking back, I would have **spent more time on LinkedIn** much earlier, not just posting but actively reaching out to people and building relationships. People were far kinder and more open than I expected, and starting those conversations earlier would have accelerated both awareness and lead generation.

Another lesson is that **you will not get it right the first time.** Your packaging and pricing will evolve, and that is normal. The key is being open to feedback and not being afraid to ask other founders directly for their perspective.

Finally, I would remind myself to **embrace the founder mindset.** Being a solopreneur is not so different from being a startup founder. You face the same challenges of finding product-market fit, validating ideas, and iterating along the way. The sooner you see yourself that way, the more intentional and confident your decisions will become.



Konstantina Gavalá

Founder & Creative Director of Yellow Studio – Spain

In a creative career spanning more than 20 years, I have learned that **the keys to lasting success are continual growth, constant creation, and the ability to fully enjoy every stage of the journey.** My professional path began in architecture, where I discovered how design and structure shape not only physical spaces but also human experience. Pursuing two master's degrees in architecture, design, and photography expanded my visual vocabulary and reignited my creative passion. Driven by curiosity, I later embraced graphic design, a discipline that allowed me to weave together lessons from all my previous fields while sharpening my skills and broadening my outlook.

The defining moment in my journey came when I co-wrote, designed, and published my first book. That act of authorship unlocked opportunities I had never anticipated: awards, interviews, speaking invitations, and roles as a jury member for international competitions. The book became both a tool for self-discovery and a catalyst for continued growth.

My strongest advice to fellow creatives is simple: **Keep growing, and write a book about what you are passionate about.** Sharing your perspective not only amplifies your expertise but also opens doors to wider networks and new opportunities. Allow every phase of your journey to inspire your work. No matter where you start, keep learning, evolving, and expanding your skills.





Gabriel Grbec

Co-Founder of Picmim – Slovenia



If I could start over with the knowledge I have today, I would first tell myself: **Don't overcomplicate things and trust the process a bit more.** As a young entrepreneur, I often overthought every decision, created countless scenarios in my head, and compared my journey to other companies. It constantly felt like everyone else was more prepared, more experienced, and further ahead.

There were many moments when I stepped into something completely unknown with little experience, green but driven by determination and supported by a team that believed in the vision. Looking back, it was exactly in those uncomfortable moments that the biggest breakthroughs happened. I am still learning, failing, and growing every day, but I now understand that **growth rarely happens inside your comfort zone.**

Entrepreneurship is not always glamorous. It is filled with doubts, sleepless nights, and questions about whether it is all worth it. But every small step, even the difficult ones, becomes part of your story. That is why today I remind myself not to wait for the perfect moment. Just start. It will not always be easy, but it will be worth it.

My advice: **Stop comparing yourself to others** and start comparing who you are today to who you were yesterday. Your only real competition is your previous self.



Frida Rochin

Co-Founder of Bkup Agency | Founder of Axia AI – Mexico

Savor failure and enjoy the process without the pressure of trying to be the “perfect entrepreneur.” The truth is, there is no checklist for becoming one. Most of the requirements we think make us valid entrepreneurs exist only in our heads.

It is important to be driven and to keep pushing ourselves, but if the pressure goes beyond what is healthy, we will not get very far. **Business is not about speed; it is about endurance.** Stay healthy, sleep well, move your body, get regular checkups, and take care of yourself. If not for your own sake, then do it for your venture. The vision belongs to you, which makes you your most valuable asset. Treat yourself accordingly.

As entrepreneurs, it is easy to let ourselves go in the name of success, but **being grounded, happy, and healthy should always be the priority.** Since we are our ventures and our ventures are us, our businesses cannot thrive if we are not doing well ourselves.

Here is the truth I wish someone had told me earlier: There are no perfect entrepreneurs. There are only happy, well-rounded entrepreneurs and short-term entrepreneurs. **Which one are you going to choose?**



Ashish Alexander

Founder & CEO of Revlearn – Australia

1) **Understand your finances early:** Know exactly where your money will come from and how your business will sustain itself. Many startups focus only on user growth and survive because they have large investments or existing capital. But if you don't have that kind of funding, you must think about profitability from day one. Build a model that is financially sustainable and keeps you independent.

2) **Don't be afraid to do things for free in the beginning:** If you're passionate about what you do, the experience you gain will eventually turn into expertise, and that's when you can start charging for it. It takes time to become excellent, both in your product and your communication. You can have a great product, but if you haven't learned how to express its value, it won't succeed. So be patient, learn, and grow into what you deserve to be paid for.

3) **Never let anyone tell you that you can't do something:** Almost everything is possible with persistence. You'll encounter people who doubt you or project their fears onto you. Learn to tune out that noise. Spending time thinking about their opinions will only waste your time. As Nelson Mandela said, “It always seems impossible until it's done.”





Ife Badejo

Founder of Islandpreneur International – St. Maarten

ISLANDPRENEUR

If I were starting my journey again, I would tell myself this: **Don't let fear talk you out of what faith is talking you into.** I have lived through storms, both literal and personal. I survived several hurricanes that reshaped everything I knew about safety, direction, and identity. And yet, on the other side of disaster, I discovered capacity, resilience, and God's timing in ways I could not have imagined. Fear will always speak, but faith has the final say if you let it.

In my career, I've hosted and produced more than 90 events, not because I always felt confident, but because I learned early that clarity comes in motion. No one truly knows what they're doing at the beginning. Everyone is figuring it out, just at different levels and with different resources. So **move, even when you feel unsure.** Confidence is built in the doing.

I would tell myself: **Value your gifts early.** Don't discount your brilliance. Set your standards high and never lower them to be accepted, understood, or tolerated. What you allow teaches the world how to treat you.

Don't glorify struggle. **Build systems.** Money doesn't respond to hustle; it responds to structure, clarity, and intention. Money loves systems. Systems create freedom. Freedom creates impact.

Success is not one grand moment, it is a process. The only real excuses are the ones you agree to believe. And yet, **give yourself grace.** You are learning, evolving, becoming. Rest is part of the work.

Finally, I would remind myself that every challenge and every opportunity carries a question: Do I persist or do I pivot? Mastery comes from knowing the difference. Persistence builds strength. Pivoting builds wisdom. In other words, **innovate for impact, focus fearlessly, and execute with excellence.**



Vladeta Radovanović

Founder & CEO of Presta – Serbia



If I were starting my journey again, knowing what I know today, I would tell myself three things that would have changed everything sooner.

- 1) **Build the right team, not just a company:** Your company is only as strong as the people who believe in its mission. Early on, I focused too much on delivery and not enough on culture. Over time, I learned that shared values, mutual trust, and accountability create far more impact than any single founder ever could. Culture is not a slogan; it is the daily behavior that defines how you work and grow together.
- 2) **Be a leader, not a boss:** Leadership is not about giving direction; it is about creating clarity, removing fear, and helping others grow into their potential. The moment I shifted from controlling outcomes to enabling people, everything scaled faster: quality, motivation, and even revenue.
- 3) **Invest early in sales:** For years, I thought quality would sell itself. It does not. You can have the best product or service, but without proactive outreach and storytelling, no one will know. Sales is not manipulation; it is communication of value. Start early, experiment often, and make it a discipline, not an afterthought.

If I had understood these lessons earlier, I would have built the same company but probably reached today's maturity much sooner. Because success is not just about building something great; it is about **building it with the right people**, culture, and communication from day one.



Maya Peron Strel

Founder of Kind To Be – Slovenia



If I were to start my entrepreneurial journey again, I would do many things the same, only with more trust, less tension, and less need for perfection. I would begin from vision, not necessity, and step into the unknown because I want to, not because I have to. **What matters most is the mindset we bring when starting.**

In the beginning, I believed everything had to be perfect: the logo, plan, team, and website. Perfection never came, so we simply started. I would do the same today, but with fewer doubts and the awareness that the right moment never comes. Perfection is often an excuse not to take risks. **Once you start, the path reveals itself.** What we need most is not all the answers but the trust that we will find them.

I would follow growth with more patience. **Slow growth is not failure but wisdom.** Growing too fast breaks weak foundations. I would allow more time, more breath, and build at my own rhythm. I would find a mentor early, someone who listens and reminds me who I am. Asking for help is not weakness but maturity. No one builds their journey alone. Even in a world of AI and automation, business remains human. At the center are people: colleagues, partners, clients. If you build relationships sincerely, results follow.

Kindness is not weakness but strength. Being kind means having integrity and clear boundaries. You can say no without guilt and stay respectful even when hurt. Above all, **be kind to yourself.** My company is not my identity. It is a space for creation, not a measure of worth. Once you understand that, peace follows. I would still put family first. Business can wait; childhood cannot. Family keeps you grounded and whole. I would trust my team more. Controlling everything kills creativity and causes burnout. A car accident taught me to let go and let others grow.

Do not fear failure. It is part of success. Failure teaches patience, humility, and clarity about what truly matters. Schedule time for yourself. Silence is where answers come from and good ideas are born. Life follows its own laws. You cannot control outcomes, only your response. Trust the process. Entrepreneurship is not just a path to success, it is a path of becoming. Success fades, but the feelings and people along the way remain. To the young: dare to dream, dare to be, and dare to become. Do not fear falling. Be kind, set boundaries, and play fair. Energy always balances everything, and in the end, inner peace matters most.



Patricia Sunderland

Founder & President of Cultural Research & Analysis – USA

CRAstudio.com

My advice would be to **do what you love so that you will love what you do**. Respect those who have gone before you and learn from them, while also keeping young people in the mix and learning from them as well.

Realize that the feelings and success of your clients or customers are ultimately the most important of all. Always consider their concerns and preferences and find the best way to accommodate these while keeping a keen eye on what can and cannot be done, as well as what might also be possible. Always try your best to keep them safe and take care of them, especially when problems or difficult situations arise. **Help them to succeed and you will also succeed.**

All of this I learned from noticing how I was treated by my travel agent and thinking about what she did for me. Notably, whenever she was in doubt about my feelings or sensed a problem seeping through a textual exchange, she picked up the phone. Most people no longer use the services of travel agents, but I, almost three decades later, still go to her for travel needs, both professional and personal. Importantly, she's also very, very good at her job, finding deals and solutions that one cannot easily find via Booking.com, Expedia.com nor all the rest.

In short, **be the best at what you do for others.**



Dino Zafirakos

Founder & Systems Coach of Dino Zafirakos – Spain



If I were to start my journey again, I would tell myself: **Seek clarity, not certainty.** For years, I chased certainty. I needed to know the right answer, the right strategy, the right next move. But certainty often closes doors. It narrows our field of vision, makes us defend positions, and blinds us to what is unfolding around us.

Clarity, on the other hand, invites awareness. It is about seeing the field, not fixing the outcome. When we seek clarity, we learn to observe more of what is around us. We begin to **understand what is actually happening**, rather than what we wish were happening.

In my work with leadership teams, I have seen this shift change everything. The most effective leaders are not those who hold the most answers, but those who cultivate the clearest perspective. They create coherence without pretending to control complexity. They **make space for uncertainty while keeping direction intact.**

If I could speak to my younger self, I would remind myself that **mastery is not about having it all figured out.** It is about seeing more, with less distortion. Clarity is calm. Clarity is courage. It allows us to move wisely, even when the path ahead is uncertain.

That is the essence of leading well, and perhaps of living well too: not to eliminate uncertainty, but to navigate it with clarity, purpose, and grace.



Karla Kannan

Founder of Quimera – USA



The most valuable asset you'll build isn't just a resume; it's a portfolio of knowledge shaped by the risks you take, the roles you stretch beyond, and the lessons you learn when things don't go as planned.

It's tempting to wait for the "perfect fit," but **real growth often begins in moments of uncertainty**. The detours, side projects, and out-of-scope initiatives are the moments that prepared me most to lead, to advise, and eventually, to build my own consultancy.

If you're thinking of launching something on your own, remember that your edge lies in how you think, adapt, and bring value differently. Every project, even the messy or failed ones, teaches you something that compounds. That **experience becomes your advantage**.

Say yes, show up, stay curious. The confidence will follow.



Love (Asikiya Iyalla) Uduma

Founder of My Sweet Story – Nigeria



Build patiently, but position boldly. Not every idea needs instant validation; focus on solving real problems, not just being seen. Invest early in relationships, not just resources, and remember: the vision is valid, even when the results aren't immediate.

It's easy to get caught up in speed and optics when starting out, but real growth comes from clarity, consistency, and community. I've learned that **purpose-driven work often takes time to bear fruit**, but when it does, it's deeply fulfilling and impactful.

Wishing your readers the courage to stay true to their vision, even when the road isn't easy.



Andrej Ipavec

Founder of AI Svetovanje & AI Academy – Slovenia



Increase the rate of failure. Failure is not the opposite of success; it is the path that leads to it. Every mistake, every wrong turn, every disappointment are not signs to stop, but lessons in disguise. The faster you fail, the faster you learn. The key, however, is not just to fail but to reflect. **Failure plus reflection equals progress.** Take time to analyze what went wrong, what could have been done differently, and what you've learned about yourself in the process. Those reflections will shape your instincts, refine your strategy, and strengthen your resilience far more than any textbook or seminar ever could.

Over time, I also learned that **persistence matters more than intelligence.** You do not need to be the smartest person in the room, only the one who refuses to quit. When clients disappear, projects fall apart, or deals collapse, your ability to keep moving defines you far more than luck or intellect.

And then there's networking, something I once deeply underestimated. In the early years, I believed that hard work and good products would speak for themselves. I was wrong. The truth is that **relationships build opportunities.** The right conversation can open doors months of effort cannot. Networking is about genuine connection and trust, not quick gains. The stronger your relationships, the smoother your journey.

With time, I also realized that you don't have to do everything yourself. As founders, we often start by wearing every hat: sales, marketing, operations, finance, customer support. But **true growth requires letting go.** If someone can do a task 70% as well as you, delegate it. They will improve, and you can focus where you add the most value. Build a team whose strengths balance yours and trust them to deliver. Leadership is not control; it is creating space for others to excel.

Finally, **trust your instinct.** Data and analysis matter, but intuition is often wiser. It reflects everything you have experienced and observed. When the numbers look good but something feels off, listen. Some of the best decisions come from following that quiet inner signal.

To sum it up: Fail faster and reflect deeper. Persist longer than others think is reasonable. Build relationships before you need them. Delegate with trust and humility. And listen to that quiet inner voice; it knows more than you think. Entrepreneurship is not a straight road. It's a long, unpredictable journey filled with lessons that shape not only your business but your character. Success, I've learned, is not measured by revenue or recognition, but by how much you grow through the process and how many people you positively impact along the way.



Sandra Bohinec Gorjak

Founder of ARISA – Slovenia



When a person begins the entrepreneurial journey, it feels like stepping onto a ship bound for unknown horizons. At first, there is excitement, creative freedom, and that inner voice saying, “Yes, this is my path! I can create something meaningful with the world!” Yet this journey soon becomes a test of knowledge, maturity, courage, and the ability to stay true to oneself when the waves rise, the wind shifts, and the horizon fades.

- 1) **Trust your inner compass:** You are not here by coincidence. True entrepreneurs create from purpose, not just for profit. A clear vision makes perseverance easier, as it did for Walt Disney, who built not only a company but a world that inspired generations.
- 2) **Do not be driven only by profit:** Let an inner “yes” to life guide you. When challenges arise and doubts appear, your mission will keep you steady. Money follows value, but purpose gives strength to endure.
- 3) **Let intuition guide you:** It’s the quiet inner voice that speaks with certainty. Entrepreneurship is not only logical but also a path through uncertainty. Every meaningful decision carries a moment of inner knowing. Intuition is not mystical; it is a blend of knowledge, experience, values, and perception. It points not to shortcuts but to a direction that honours both yourself and others.
- 4) **Create with quality:** In a time when anyone can speak, not everyone has something valuable to say. Lasting success comes from the quality of what you create, whether a product, service, or experience. Quality carries integrity, and people can feel when something is made with genuine intention rather than for the market alone.
- 5) **Be authentic and creative:** Authenticity is not a marketing strategy; it is a way of being. When we try too hard to meet others’ expectations, we lose what makes us unique and irreplaceable. Creativity comes from the courage to think beyond boundaries and the bravery to express new ideas.
- 6) **Be mindful of where you place your attention:** It is your most valuable capital. What you focus on becomes your reality. Your thoughts follow your attention, and your entrepreneurial identity grows in the direction you nurture most.
- 7) **Success is not only about results but about who we become:** Any success that asks us to betray ourselves costs too much. Real strength lies in integrity and inner maturity. Those who create with honesty always leave a mark, even if it cannot be measured. The entrepreneurial path is a journey of heart, and those who walk it openly always find their way.

If I were starting again today, I would remind myself: Carry your greatness with pride, yet remain humble in the process. Seek a deep connection with your vision. Endure moments of emptiness and uncertainty, for it is there that the wisest and most magnificent ideas are born. Do not strive for perfection; strive for authenticity and truth. There will be storms, but you will endure because your compass is in your heart. Trust, not because the path is easy, but because it is yours.



Melanie Schöyen

Founder of Melanie Schöyen – Germany



- 1) **Do not doubt yourself.** Trust your strengths and experiences instead of trying to meet too many expectations or listening to too many voices.
- 2) **Know your worth** and stay true to who you are, as this is the most genuine and sustainable way to succeed.
- 3) **Surround yourself with a well-curated network of female allies.** That kind of support is worth more than an army of coaches and consultants.

We rise by lifting each other.



Mateja Kalin

Founder of LaliCup – Slovenia



For me, the key is staying true to yourself: to your values, your vision, and what genuinely inspires you. **Authenticity builds meaningful relationships** and creates a positive work environment where creativity and satisfaction can thrive.

I also believe you should **explore different areas and try out various paths** until you find what truly fits. That is the only way to discover the kind of work that excites you and makes you feel alive.

Work should not feel like just another obligation. When you find a passion that drives you, everything flows more naturally and becomes more fulfilling.

And finally, **surround yourself with the right people**, those who support you, lift you up, and help you grow. Genuine connections matter not only for success, but also for your personal wellbeing.



Marvellous Onyeke

Founder & CEO of The Heph Eagles School – Nigeria



I would begin by reminding myself to **choose a path that aligns deeply with my purpose and passion**. These two elements must come before popularity or what seems to work for others. Alignment with purpose brings fulfilment, joy, and peace, which become the fuel that keeps you going when challenges arise. Alignment with passion gives natural motivation, making the work feel meaningful rather than stressful.

Conviction is another non-negotiable. It will carry you through when things do not go as planned. **Avoid jumping between paths**; conviction keeps you grounded. Many people quit too early, right before success begins to unfold. Conviction strengthens focus and helps you filter out distractions, even when well-meaning people tell you to stop.

A clear vision is the greatest capital you can have. It defines your direction and prevents unnecessary stumbling. Once you have captured it, communicate it clearly to those around you. When like-minded people understand your vision, they can help you move faster and with shared purpose.

Build meaningful relationships and networks deliberately. **Connect with people and organizations that share your values**, and stay cautious around those who do not. Oversharing your vision with the wrong people can weaken your progress or even derail it completely. Discuss your entrepreneurial goals with the important people in your life. Their understanding and support can help stabilize your path, while a lack of it can create setbacks. Securing their cooperation early will make difficult periods easier to navigate.

Focus on building systems that let your business thrive without depending solely on you. Establish checks and balances, reporting structures, quality standards, and clear operating procedures. **A strong system ensures continuity even in your absence**.

Keep learning. Stay updated with new trends, technologies, and ideas. This is not about collecting certificates but gaining knowledge you can apply. **Learn beyond your area of expertise**, as diverse insights often spark innovation.

Give your best to your venture, but never at the cost of your well-being. A healthy entrepreneur builds a healthy business. **Balance hard work with physical, mental, and emotional rest**.

Finally, **stay original**. The world needs authentic voices, not copies. Learn from others, but remain true to your vision. Listen to feedback, but never abandon what makes your work uniquely yours.



Kreta Evertsz

General Manager (Next Generation Operator) at Cabana Beach Bar & Restaurant – Sint Maarten



Success isn't about rushing to arrive; it's about learning to lead, serve, and grow with grace. **Every challenge you face will shape your strength.** Every detour will refine your direction. Don't fear the slow seasons; they're where your foundation is built. The real breakthrough comes when you stop chasing perfection and start mastering consistency.

Trust your vision, but also trust God's timing. The doors meant for you will open when you're prepared, disciplined, and walking in purpose. **Focus on building people,** not just profits. Your business will only grow as much as your team feels valued, trained, and inspired.

Be intentional with your finances. Learn early that financial freedom isn't about how much you earn, but how wisely you manage and multiply it. And remember, **you can't pour from an empty cup.** Protect your peace, your energy, and your health as part of your business strategy, because they are.

Lastly, **dream bigger than your circumstances,** but stay humble enough to serve others along the way. Legacy isn't what you leave behind when you're gone; it's what you build while you're here through discipline, vision, and love.



Mehtap Battal

Co-Founder & CEO of Digital Group Partners – Turkey



Entrepreneurship begins and ends with vision. Those who do not know where they are going are swept away by every wind and disappear. First, **develop a vision that will illuminate your path** even in the most difficult storms. Strengthen this vision by building both individual and organizational resilience.

The real strength of an enterprise is not shown in moments of success; it appears in times of uncertainty, crisis, and disruptive change. In such moments, the entire company must adapt managerially, commercially, and technologically. It must develop the capacity for recovery and renewal.

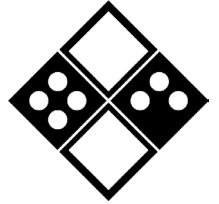
How is this achieved? **Resilience begins with people.** Investing in people, developing their skills, well-being, and careers are the highest-return decisions an entrepreneur can make.

By building a culture that nurtures happiness and meaning, remember that an enterprise is not just about numbers, goals, and meetings. A cycle of sprints without passion, joy, or meaning will never win a marathon. On the road to success, **focus less on avoiding exhaustion and more on making the journey enjoyable.** True wisdom lies there.



Jaka Janežič

Founder of digitaliziraj.si – Slovenia



Every entry into entrepreneurship comes with its own obstacles. The advice I would give myself and others, in addition to perseverance, is that **every cent matters**. Especially in the early stages, when financing without family wealth or external backing becomes the biggest barrier, it is crucial to monitor every unnecessary expense. With proper control over spending, and a bit of luck, you can avoid the difficult “survival phase” that nearly every entrepreneur faces when trying to build something.

In the early phase of your journey as an entrepreneur, you will encounter many challenges that, in addition to business and management knowledge, will mostly stem from financial pressures. That is why, especially at the beginning, **it is essential to keep a close eye on your spending**. This does not just mean controlling company expenses but also your personal spending. Regardless of whether your business is a sole proprietorship or a limited company, as the owner, you are the primary and often the only person the company can rely on. Even established companies reach points where they depend on additional investments from their owners, not only to stay afloat but also to seize new opportunities and fulfill their potential.

Running simple calculations to determine how many months you can operate without sufficient income is extremely important. In building your entrepreneurial path, **every piece of information matters**. Knowing how much time you have to achieve success is one of the most critical pieces of information, and it has nothing to do with your specific trade or industry.

Remaining liquid as an owner, especially in the early stages, is the single most important thing. **Liquidity provides the stability and security** that your idea and initial investment need, as well as a safety buffer for operations.

To summarize with an example: a company whose owner is the richest person in the world enjoys far greater business security than one whose owner is not financially liquid. I believe that without confidence in your own success or in the success of your company, you would never embark on the entrepreneurial journey in the first place. That is why, beyond perseverance, no other time will demand or carry as much weight in tightening your belt as the beginning of your entrepreneurial path.



Danijela Šantak

Co-Founder of Cyber-Sec – Slovenia



Starting your own business is an exciting yet challenging journey. When I founded my first company selling computer hardware, we quickly faced the global recession of 2007. Survival depended on flexibility, minimal stock management, precise automated XML-based pricing calculations, and a highly skilled purchasing approach. Keeping operations lean with limited employees was critical. This adaptability turned initial challenges into opportunities, growing annual turnover from 500.000 € to 2.5 million €. After successfully exiting that venture and taking a reflective break, I co-founded my current cybersecurity company, building directly on the lessons I had learned.

Here are the key lessons I would give my younger self:

- 1) Take it one step at a time.
- 2) Plan carefully, but regularly revisit and refine your strategy.
- 3) Aim for short-term, achievable milestones while maintaining a clear long-term vision.
- 4) Seek out niche opportunities rather than overwhelming yourself with overly ambitious targets.
- 5) Remember, excessively large initial goals can become more of a psychological and financial burden than a motivator.
- 6) Stay flexible, stay focused, and be prepared to adapt your business model as circumstances change. Success comes not from rigid adherence to initial plans but from resilience, practical short-term targets, and a realistic outlook for future growth.



Susie Taaffe

Founder of Skanties – USA



You think you need confidence to succeed, but **what you really need is belief**. Belief that you can survive the worst-case scenario and still keep going.

When I was starting Skanties, it was a side hustle I bootstrapped hard. I went into debt, more than double my yearly salary, to produce the first batch. Before I even launched, I discovered the entire batch might be faulty. Unfixable. Unsellable. No revenue. No traction. No way out. That was my lowest moment. I could not see a path forward. I fully surrendered. But in that surrender, I found something unshakable: I still believed in the product, and in myself. So I got up. I found a local seamstress. I fixed what I could, batch by batch, piece by piece. I scraped together every cent. By the end of the year, all 7,500 garments had been repaired by hand in small batches. There was still no guarantee it would work. And then it happened. An influencer posted. Orders came in. And this time, I had the stock to deliver.

That moment taught me what no strategy book could: how to hold your dream when it is gasping for breath, how to build from the ashes, and how to lead yourself before anyone else believes in you.

If I could go back and give advice to myself at the very beginning, I would say:

- 1) Grit is a skill, not a trait. Build it.
- 2) Do not wait for perfect. Move with what you have.
- 3) Surrender is not giving up. It is leaning into a deeper knowing.
- 4) Belief, real and unwavering, is your most valuable asset.
- 5) Your dream does not need you to be fearless. It needs you to be faithful. And yes, what you are building is worth it.



Janez Trilobit

Co-Founder & CEO of Trilobit – Slovenia

TRILOBIT

Based on the answer to the question “Why?”, I would **establish a clear and meaningful goal**. This goal would guide all my efforts, and I would pursue it with a carefully chosen team of experts from various fields. Their knowledge and experience would be invaluable in helping us stay focused and make informed decisions. I would commit to following this goal without major compromises that could dilute our purpose or values. Staying true to the original “why” behind the goal would keep the team motivated and aligned throughout the process.

I would **remain grateful for the opportunity to keep learning and growing**. Continuous education allows us to adapt, improve, and overcome challenges. Embracing failure as a natural part of the journey would also be essential. Instead of fearing it, I would see failure as a chance to learn and refine our approach.

At the same time, I would **stay open to new opportunities that arise unexpectedly**, as they often lead to innovation and progress.

Most importantly, I would **remember that the entire process is like a game**. Keeping a playful mindset helps maintain motivation, reduces stress, and makes the journey more enjoyable while balancing seriousness with lightheartedness.



Andrea Mladin

Founder & CEO of PTA Solutions and AM – Serbia



- 1) **Don't rush** to build everything at once. Dream big, yes, but plan fewer things in parallel.
- 2) **Clarity comes from focus**, not from endless multitasking. Build systems early, automate what drains your energy, and learn to say "no" faster.
- 3) Some of the best things in business happen by serendipity, when you leave space for unexpected ideas and people to find you. And when things feel chaotic (because they will), **don't panic**.
- 4) **Chaos just means you're in motion**. The real art is not escaping it, but organizing it. That's where growth happens, right between structure and spontaneity.



Kristina Rajzer

Founder of Recognized Agency – Slovenia

Recognized!

Your network is your strongest asset. One day you might lose a deal, a partner, or even a company, but your network will remain the foundation of your growth. Opportunities don't come from hard work and vision alone; they come from people. Building a strong and genuine network is like investing in an endless source of value, both in business and in life.

Don't be afraid to ask for help, and don't be afraid to partner with someone. Throughout my career I have reached out to many people for guidance, introductions, or advice, and almost all of them were happy to help. We often underestimate how willing others are to share their experiences if we simply take the step to ask.

Finally, **always think about the outcome of your plans**. Marketing is not the endpoint of the customer journey, it is only one piece of the puzzle. Invest equally in every aspect of your business, from sales and customer experience to partnerships and operations, because true growth comes from a balanced strategy.



Robert Šefman

Founder & CEO of SHARK-MS – Slovenia



If I had to start over, I'd follow the best advice I ever got: Your first 100 videos will suck. In other words, just start. **Don't wait to be perfect.** Do the reps, make the calls, write the posts, and show up. It is impossible to do 100 focused, consistent attempts and not improve. Your first 100 will be absolute garbage, not "kind of bad" but "please delete this from the internet" bad. And that is okay. That is normal. Post them anyway. Nobody is watching yet, and that is your perfect window to be terrible.

I would also remind myself to ask more. Ask like a toddler in a candy store. Remember when you were a kid and wanted something? You did whatever it took. **Ask for help, ask for feedback, and ask for the sale.** The worst thing that can happen is you don't get it, but not asking guarantees that. Asking is a simple superpower, and most doors in business stay closed only because no one bothers to knock.

Another truth is to **fall in love with failure.** The faster you fail, the faster you learn. Failure is not the opposite of success, it is the price of admission. Treat it like a brutally honest friend: not always nice, but always useful. Fail gloriously and fail so loud it echoes, because success is simply failure with better PR.

I would also tell myself to decide. The word "decision" comes from the Latin *decidere*, meaning to cut off. **Cut what is not helping you;** projects, habits, even people. As Michelangelo said about carving David: "I just removed everything that wasn't him." Do the same, because the masterpiece is already in you.

And finally, **sell before you build.** If no one wants your idea before it exists, building it will not fix that. Nothing validates an idea faster than a customer's money. Revenue is the oxygen of your business, so breathe early and breathe often.

Start Ugly, Ask Boldly, Fail Loud.



Inja Dovšak

Founder of ID media – Slovenia



When I started out, I didn't have much figured out, but I did take the time to find my "why." I knew what felt meaningful and what kind of work I wanted to stand behind. So the first thing I'd highlight is this: **Stay true to your values.** This is the foundation for every decision I make. Alignment is worth more than any short-term win. It's better to walk away from opportunities that don't feel right than to compromise what you believe in. In my experience, every time you say no to something that's not aligned, another door opens that fits much better.

Along the way, I learned that **you should trust your gut more**, that quiet voice that tells you when something feels right or off. It's not something you can measure, but it's rarely wrong. It's important to gather all the information you can before making decisions, but it's just as important to listen to your intuition. Intuition doesn't compete with logic; it complements it.

When things get uncomfortable, face them early. **Have the hard conversations as soon as possible.** They're never easy, but avoiding them only delays growth. What we don't address, we choose to accept. Once you face things with honesty, trust grows, relationships strengthen, and work becomes better aligned.

Growth comes from action, not perfection. If you're starting out or trying something new, begin before you feel ready. Striving for perfection only slows you down, and mistakes are part of learning. Ask for help when and where you need it. It's a strength. Working with people you trust and who share your values will take you much further than trying to carry everything alone.

Nurture the power of connection. Some of the best opportunities I've had started with a simple, genuine conversation on LinkedIn. When you show up as yourself, share what you're working on, and connect with people who believe in similar things, the right opportunities find you.

Finally, **let yourself make mistakes often, forgive yourself just as often, and take the lessons with you.** Keep learning, stay curious, and be open to constructive feedback. Keep investing in yourself. Growth starts within, and when we grow, our businesses evolve too.



Craig Wright

Founder of ParentPlayer – UK



Stay authentic and true to your values. Even if you can't see the full path ahead, start anyway. Stay adaptable and keep learning. Don't be afraid to bring in people who are better equipped in certain areas. Delegate and collaborate.

Remember, **real progress comes from building strong relationships** and genuinely connecting with people. Listen, learn, and treat every interaction as an opportunity to grow together. Trust is built through actions, not words. If you say you'll email by 10 a.m., make sure it's there by 8. Always deliver on what you promise; reliability and consistency will take you further than talent alone.

Above all, **make sure your work has purpose and passion behind it.** That's what keeps you going, and that's what earns the respect and trust of those around you.



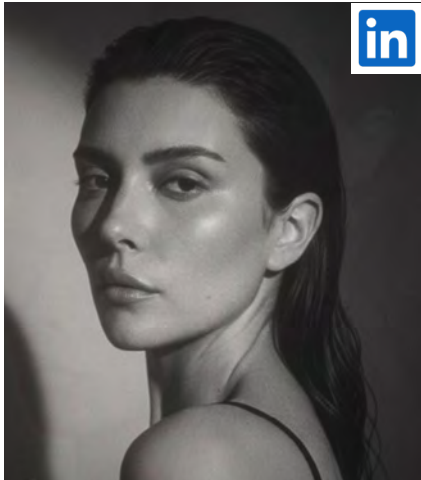
Eiyen Dickerson

Founder & CEO of Femher – USA



Stay focused, stay resilient, and build grit, especially when nothing seems to work. I founded femher two years ago, and only now is it launching and gaining traction. Along the way I was rejected by investors, doors closed on me, and I had to find another path.

What kept me going was not motivation or money, it was passion. **Passion carries you through the quiet days**, the rejections, and the moments when it feels like no one understands. If you truly believe in what you are building, keep going. That **belief is your superpower.**



Sarah Koben

Founder & Creative Director of Maison Art of Living – UAE



My journey began as an interior designer in Dubai. Very quickly, I realised how difficult it was to source furniture that matched my European eye and my creative identity. Instead of compromising, I decided to take a leap into manufacturing. I partnered with factories, learned the production process from the inside, and eventually launched my own furniture line. I now create my own collection as well as custom-made pieces for B2B clients and selected B2C requests.

If I look back, my biggest challenge was getting lost in the immensity of possibilities. Too many fabrics, too many samples, too many creative directions all at once. I had the passion but not yet the structure. That lack of structure created unnecessary stress and a “never ending” workflow. With experience, I learned that **creativity without boundaries becomes overwhelming**. I also learned that being a designer is one thing, but becoming an entrepreneur requires a completely different mindset. Structure, systems, and clarity are not optional; they are the foundation.

So if I could restart my journey, I would:

- 1) Create my operational structure first
- 2) Define clear tools, workflows, and limits to protect my creativity
- 3) Reduce the noise by consciously curating my options
- 4) Enter the market with a focused capsule rather than trying to offer everything

This is how I built my current method. For example, instead of presenting clients with endless textiles, I created my own Fabric Library of about 200 carefully chosen samples that I work with consistently. Special requests are still possible, but the core selection keeps my process efficient, clear, and stress free.

Another key lesson was understanding the importance of visual storytelling. I initially launched without Instagram, then quickly realised how essential it was. I began creating my own editorial visuals to establish the Maison Art of Living universe: organic shapes, biophilic influence, warm palettes, and sculptural comfort. This allowed me to communicate my identity and connect directly with clients and collaborators.

In short, my advice to my younger self would be: **Structure first, creativity second, execution third. Build the foundation, then expand**. It saves time, money, and energy, and it protects the joy of creation.



Arham Zahid

Founder & CEO of Codify Tech – UAE

Starting and growing a business takes courage, patience, and self-awareness. These are the lessons I've learned along the way:

- 1) **Be patient and kind to yourself:** Growth is a journey, not a destination. Do not compare your progress to others.
- 2) **Take calculated risks:** Step out of your comfort zone and try new things.
- 3) **Learn from failures:** See every setback as an opportunity to grow and improve.
- 4) **Build meaningful relationships:** Surround yourself with people who support and uplift you.
- 5) **Stay curious and keep learning:** Remain adaptable and open to new ideas and perspectives.
- 6) **Prioritize self-care:** Protect your physical, mental, and emotional well-being.
- 7) **Set realistic goals:** Break big goals into smaller, achievable steps.
- 8) **Trust your instincts:** Believe in your abilities and listen to your intuition.





Inna Hall

Founder, Director & Lawyer of Law Tram – Australia

Entrepreneurship is not just about the brilliance of an idea or the size of an opportunity. It is about who you are when things get difficult. The most powerful skill you can learn early is discipline. **Discipline carries you through the days** when you do not feel like working, when doubts creep in, and when setbacks test your resolve. Success is built not in rare moments of inspiration but in the quiet, repeated choice to keep going. Every small action compounds, and discipline ensures progress is never lost.

Equally important is the life you build outside your business. Take your relationships with family and friends seriously. **Entrepreneurship requires enormous energy and resilience**, and if your personal world is in turmoil, it will pull you away from your goals. A strong foundation in your relationships gives you stability when the business storm inevitably arrives. Those bonds become your anchor, your reminder of who you are beyond your venture, and the strength you can lean on when times are hard.

To succeed as an entrepreneur, **commit to both unshakable discipline and a rich personal life**. Together they give you the endurance to keep building, the perspective to see clearly, and the resilience to rise again after every fall. With these, you can face challenges with faith, knowing you have everything within you to succeed.

Discipline builds progress. Strong relationships keep you standing. Together they create the resilience every entrepreneur needs.



LAW TRAM



Dejan Poljvaš

Founder & Game Director of Gameboar Studio – Serbia



Be the person who removes the anxiety of uncertainty from the client's mind. **How you carry yourself during the initial meeting sets the tone for the collaboration** and lays the foundation for any future engagement, not just with that client but potentially with their entire network.

In today's climate of rapid progress and AI-driven ventures, where skill is abundant and easily acquired, be a person. Be the warmth, the reassurance, the team player, the leader, the one who can be counted on, and the one who closes and cares. The impression of certainty in your responsibility will take you far and earn you respect that opens doors pure technical skill cannot.



Nuša Breznikar

Co-Founder & CEO of Opti Solutions – Slovenia



If I were to start my business today, I'd start with a service that's close to my heart and something I truly excel at. I would **begin for free just to test the waters and get some honest feedback**. Then I'd start charging for it and focus solely on that one idea. I'd pour my heart into it and wouldn't care about opinions from people who aren't where I want to be five years from now.

Always listen to entrepreneurs who are already living your version of a perfect life, not to people who work 9 to 5 and complain about theirs.

I would **find like-minded people** and entrepreneurs who support me and help me grow, both professionally and personally.

And remember, it's completely normal if, in the beginning, no one cheers you on. **You have to be your own cheerleader**. Later, when you succeed, everyone will clap. Just don't forget who was there for you at the start. Those might be your friends for life, so cherish them.



Heather Leighton

Founder & CEO of The Ankara Academy – Australia

If I could give myself advice at the start, it would be to **accept mentorship from aligned individuals**. What has made a monumental difference to my business and sense of purpose is saying yes to mentors who share my values. Mentoring is a transformative journey where mentor and mentee build a strong bond that, with structure, intention, and respect, fosters mutual growth. That bond also becomes a remedy for the stress, burnout, and loneliness that so often come with being a founder and leader in a successful company.



Conclusion

Final Statements & Closing Notes

Conclusion

Final Statements & Closing Notes

The [Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative \(IEJI\)](#) was created to **bridge the gap between theory and practice** and to provide meaningful guidance and inspiration to entrepreneurs at every stage of their journey. To bring this vision to life, we connected with more than 150 founders, CEOs, and best-in-class leaders from around the world and asked them one question: What advice would you give yourself if you were starting your entrepreneurial journey again, with all the knowledge and experience you have today?

Their responses reflect years of dedication, lessons learned through both success and failure, and the wisdom gained from real-world experience. Each story carries valuable insights that can help others navigate challenges, make better decisions, and stay true to their purpose.

This brochure brings those insights together, combining a focused article on **‘Building Entrepreneurial Systems That Last’** with advice from global experts who continue to shape the future of entrepreneurship. Our hope is that these pages help you feel supported, better equipped, and more confident in designing systems that fit you, your work, and the impact you want to create.

THANK YOU NOTE:

A huge thank you to all 186 incredible participants who contributed to this year’s Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative. Your insights, experiences, and reflections are what give this initiative its true meaning. Every contribution adds a fresh perspective, helping us all learn, connect, and grow together. Your stories remind us why this work matters and how powerful entrepreneurship becomes when knowledge and purpose are shared.

At OPTIMOD and within the Improving Entrepreneurial Journey Initiative, we are constantly reminded that collaboration and learning are what keep entrepreneurship alive, connected, and evolving. Thank you for being part of this journey and for helping us shape a future built to last.



Indispensable partner towards optimum success

©COPYRIGHT & CREDITS:

Copyright © 2025 OPTIMOD. All rights reserved. No part of this brochure may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner, except for personal or educational purposes without any financial gain.

The information provided in this brochure is intended for general informational purposes only and should not be considered as legal, financial, or professional advice. OPTIMOD and its employees make no representations or warranties of any kind, express or implied, regarding the completeness, accuracy, reliability, suitability, or availability of the information or services mentioned in this brochure. Any reliance you place on such information is strictly at your own risk. OPTIMOD will not be liable for any losses, damages, or costs arising from the use of this brochure or the information contained herein.

Scan QR code:



Contact Us:

E-mail: info@optimod.net
Tel.: [+386 \(0\)30 646 013](tel:+38630646013)

Designed by [Urška Vidmar](#)