



When the startup is YOU

Being an entrepreneur isn't all about creating something new. Sometimes the hard work is inside: fine-tuning yourself for the journey within.

I have been teaching an 8-week workshop on technology commercialisation this Fall, and in the course of developing its modules I had a pair of realisations. One, I myself am a startup. As I pass through this mid-life phase of re-invention I weigh certain considerations that any emerging company must resolve: defining purpose and worth and how to make it happen. Two, outlining my personal ambitions through the lens of a business plan – the likes of which my students are expected to create – is incredibly beneficial. There is a process to developing great ideas that matter, then making the leap from concept to market. Working through that process and setting the emergent strategy is equally beneficial for applied personal development; what I call *intépreneurship*.

If you also feel the startup within, then a framework is needed for constructing your personal plan. A tour of the self-help aisle at your local bookstore will reveal dozens of options. But, why not exploit a system that is logical, proven and applied daily by aspiring entrepreneurs in the course of building the next Google or Apple? A robust *intépreneurial* effort needs answers to these fundamental *intépreneurial* startup questions:

Questions to ask yourself:

- **What is my intellectual property**

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(IP)? Startups are built on invention and imagination, on a base of core intelligence that defines their promise and bounds the possibilities until additional intelligence is developed or acquired. What is your personal IP? It is your base of core strengths and assimilated talents and knowledge. On this foundation you imagine what is possible. And, just as shrewd startups continue to build on their IP to sustain competitive position, you too should build on your base of intellect and skills to expand the possibilities. What are you good at? What do you want to be good at?

- **What is my product definition?** A startup's IP foundation enables many possibilities in product form and features, but the finished offering must align tightly with unmet market needs to be successful. Not so for you. Your personal product, that life passion you are committed to realising, need only satisfy your unmet needs for the principal litmus test of suitability. And this realisation is liberating. Study the art of lutherie and open a guitar repair boutique? What if the market is small? Who cares? When explaining your mission to a friend do you feel an electric surge of purpose? Okay, now you know

you're on to something. The success of int repreneurial endeavours is measured firstly by the satisfaction they induce inside. How will you define success: personal gratification and respect, absolutely; profit and fame, maybe. The time to question and explore your personal passions, ambitions, and objectives is now, during this product definition stage. These taken together will help define your mission and formulate an execution plan.

- **What is my go-to-market strategy?** The most exciting idea in the world has zero value when it is just that, an idea. How do you become relevant? The same way a startup becomes relevant; by executing effectively on the dream and exploiting its greatest value for the customer. In the case of int repreneurship, the product may target many, may target a few, or may target one. Regardless, an execution plan is essential. Sketch an arc starting at time zero (today) and ending with your achievement point; 2, 5, perhaps 10 years out. Break the arc into key milestones and those milestones into smaller markers of progress. Getting the arc right takes time, but provides an excellent system for thinking through and setting structure to your strategy. You know your IP and product at this point, the arc will provide the passion plan; your go-to-market strategy.
- **How do I last?** Faber-Castell was a startup 250 years ago. How do they remain so relevant for so long? Corporate longevity is not by accident, but accomplished through a deliberate sustainability strategy. Int repreneurs want to achieve something of real passion. This takes real time and real energy. We're not as robust post-50 as we were pre-30 and attention to diet and fitness is critical. Since crossing the 50 barrier I have pursued the holy health trinity of mind, body, and soul and it helps considerably. Meditation and a work-out emphasising balance and flexibility through yoga work for me in the mind and body department, and the simple avoidance of processed foods and enjoying the kitchen are doing wonders for my soul.
- **How do I give back?** Corporate philanthropy / community involvement is not universal and clearly not a requisite for a company's success and long-term prosperity. Still, the most admired companies develop programmes around corporate responsibility, and most of us want to be admired for being a net positive force on the world around us. Whether you choose to include this type of activity in your mission is solely a personal decision, but one worth

considering.

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