

A Random Walk Through Startup Space

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My view of startups

- ▶ A ramble
- ▶ Most items lie in research/startup intersection.
- ▶ Just go read PG's pages.

“Just tell them what college students don't know about startups.”

—PG

People

- ▶ **Choosing co-founders**

Think of it as if you were getting married.

- ▶ **Bad choices**

When it's not working out, don't hope for the best.

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(Possible alternate reason:
you are a revolutionary.)



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Wrong.

Sometimes, their interests aren't even *self*-aligned.



Attitude

- ▶ **Failure is part of the process.**

There will be pain.

“Thank you for what you have taught me.”

Easy to say; hard to do.

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- ▶ **Courage**

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You're a loser until you're a hero \Rightarrow

You will spend much of your professional career a huge loser.

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Example: Steve Jobs – Huge Loser

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Recommendations:

- ▶ Sutherland's “Technology and Courage”
- ▶ Hamming's “You and Your Research”

Be Stubborn / Be Flexible

- ▶ **Stubborn**

You will be told you are inexperienced, late, clueless, *etc.*
You will have dark days. And nights.
If it was easy, everyone would do it.

- ▶ **Flexible**

“No battle plan survives contact with the enemy.”

Both stubbornness & flexibility require courage.

“Thank God we did not execute that business plan.”

—Chuck Geschke

“Like most startups, we changed our plan on the fly.”

—PG

Work

“Eighty-hour weeks are the price of success when you’re competing at the margin of excellence.”

—A. Newell

“If you’re not at work on Saturday, don’t bother coming in on Sunday.”

—Silicon Valley saying

“My research interests are artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology. . . I guess those are my hobbies, too.”

—A. Newell

Hamming & compound interest

“It’s only an addiction if you try to stop.”

Only way any of this works is if you’re really into it.

“I think the principle difference between you and Ramanujan is that when Ramanujan woke up every morning, he was thinking about numbers, and when he went to bed at night, he was still thinking about numbers.”

—H. Simon

I’m not very disciplined; I have to substitute being obsessed.

Ideas

- ▶ Look for a secret weapon.
- ▶ Be prepared to strike *now*.

Example: '96 Olympics & IBM

How to construct second-generation web services?

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Example: '99 Private banking can be managed by
\$1,000 linux boxes

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Stand where the lightning strikes

Optimise your context:

- ▶ People
- ▶ Locale
- ▶ Culture
- ▶ Ideas

“Even if you believe that great science is a matter of luck, you can stand on a mountain top where lightning strikes; you don’t have to hide in the valley where you’re safe.”

—R. Hamming

Dreaming with your eyes open

“All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible. This I did.”

—T. E. Lawrence

See also: Ramanujan.

Knowledge

Be a technical master

- ▶ Netscape: Jim Clark—CS professor
- ▶ Microsoft: “billg is the smartest guy here”
- ▶ Google: Page rank
- ▶ Akamai: Theory prof. & grad student
- ▶ ITA/Orbitz: AI planning
- ▶ EDS: Mort Meyerson started as system architect
- ▶ Adobe: Xerox PARC researchers
- ▶ Macintosh: More Xerox PARC researchers
- ▶ 3Com: More Xerox PARC researchers
- ▶ Microsoft Word: More Xerox PARC researchers

Family man vs. warrior monk

Age plays a part.

At 22, you aren't worried about mortgage payments.

High variance/expected-value strategies require time.

You may need a few tries.

Beware the groove.

Grad school?

- ▶ A way to immigrate into excellence,
- ▶ And find a secret weapon / do reconnaissance.
- ▶ Grad-school friends make an excellent mafia.
- ▶ Fantastically expensive.
- ▶ Are you burning to be a wizard?
To do science?

*“The CMU doctoral program in Computer Science:
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To do science?
Or are you burning to build a company?

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Learn to write

... or wind up working for someone who can.

PG has impact because he can write.

His essays are effortless and graceful because of all the effort he puts in.

People who are masters aren't afraid to speak simply and clearly.

If you're a student, take a writing class.

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Privacy policy 2

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