

Pivot

Learning entrepreneurship from inside a tech startup.

By

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Chapter 1:

Developing an Entrepreneur

I likely have developed my entrepreneurial mindset through a seed that was planted approximately 11 years ago. While the steps I have taken into the startup world have recently materialized, I was given the necessary characteristics to take these steps when my mother purchased her own concession company years ago. As I sat there just a few months removed from my tenth birthday, I remember vividly my mother coming home telling me my family had just bought a company. My take on entrepreneurship at that time was that only the elite could become involved. From that moment on it could surely only be a straight shot to becoming a millionaire and having our town house become a thing of the past. Flash forward two years and my mom was still running the company from our town home while our equipment was stationed at my grandmother's house. She was still working her job as a bartender at our local bar on the side as well as working in a doctor's office 20 miles away. All of this was done while my step-dad was also working as a contractor, so the work day truly began at 5 when they both got off work. Even though I was only 12 years old, seeing my mother work 13 hour days on average stuck with me and is something I will never forget.

My father was also a very hard-working man, willing to go to whatever lengths to ensure I had whatever I needed to be successful. As a warehouse supervisor for Penguin Random House, his hours ended when the work was completed. I would only see my father every other weekend for the most part, however, he and I were always close. I may not have recognized it then, or even until the past few years, but there was a great synergy between my mother's side and my father's side that would eventually lead to me

receiving some of the better characteristics of entrepreneurship to which I will dive deeper into later.

While I was not involved in any Alchian style entrepreneurship (a style of entrepreneurship solely based on your forming of a business) during my high school years, outside the work I did with my mother's company, I did take a path less traveled. High School is when I took control of the path that I wanted to take into college and what would turn out to be my future career. I knew since the inception of my mother's company that I wanted to work with money. There was nothing more exciting than when she would come home from a long day of work with a big wad of cash or when my father would tell me about his money "growing" at the bank. The idea of making money work for me seemed like a quite progressive and interesting concept and is one I began to follow in High School.

While my first 2 years were focused heavily on getting my core requirements out of the way, I did manage to take "Business Principle and Practices" and "keyboarding" courses my sophomore year. My knowledge did not run deep on business; however, I did have a grasp on the operations concepts and how money/markets worked. I was the only student in the class to not take the "I like this company, so I will invest in it" route during our stock market challenge and it paid off. The next year I continued with business by becoming concurrently enrolled by my high school and through the local community college in our "Accounting Completer Program". This was a two-year independent study that led to me receiving credit for managerial accounting once I reached college. At the completion of the course I received the highest grade in the county for the final exam.

While in high school I also became heavily involved in German language courses and the German Club that would meet during our break hours. My senior year I became the president of the German Club where I grew it from under twenty members to a now healthy mid-thirties number (as recently reported by my former German teacher). As mentioned before, this is not your typical view of entrepreneurship, the corporate cutthroat lifestyle accompanied by vast wealth. I was just a teenager in High School, but a student who found his own and took control of his future through grades, extracurricular experiences, and exercise.

When I got to college my first couple years were quite parallel to those of high school. The first two years I was involved in the honors program, completed all my core requirements and just got involved in the beginnings of economics and the business major. While for a moment I strayed off into the realm of biology, that all changed early in the semester in which I strayed. I changed back to an Economics minor and Business Administration major within the first two weeks of that semester. While going through the core business and economics courses, my friend introduced me to an organization called “Enactus”. This is a global, social entrepreneurship organization with a chapter at our school. I immediately took to their project where they were working to create a backpack-jacket combination for the homeless. This project paved the way for my entrepreneurial endeavors that I would take leading up to graduation.

I became the project manager of this project where it eventually stagnated due to issues regarding the hiring process for homeless individuals. For this project we wanted to create the product, then have the homeless population manufacture them while we would pay them a wage to help them out of their circumstances. This was cut short,

however, due to the complications regarding a private institution hiring homeless individuals for a student organization. Regardless I was also named the President of this organization my junior year and then again, my following year as a senior. Senior year I would look to revamp the communication and hierarchy of the organization to create a separation between project teams and leadership to ensure autonomy and further efficiency with decision making. More importantly, however, for the sake of this story, this organization is where I began to think like an entrepreneur.

Enactus allowed for me to better understand the triple-bottom line for starting a company. Everything alluding back to the fact that you must have a healthy, sustainable business model. After seeing students create projects that would save people thousands on groceries in food deserts, to eliminating malaria in certain sections of Africa, I understood just how well the world took to big ideas. So, over the summer while working as a sales representative at Gold's Gym, I met someone who had quite a big idea of his own.

Chapter 2

Creating Practical Academics

In 2002, Professor Tan Teng-Kee received his PhD from Cambridge after years of being an entrepreneur and corporate executive. During his time while studying at Cambridge, Tan wrote a book and these that were the initiative for the development of the TIP (Technopreneurship and Innovation Program) in Nanyang, Singapore. The TIP, as described by Charles Hampden-Turner is:

“an ‘innovative ecosystem’, stretching from Singapore to China to the USA. The idea was to confront students with an environment, which had highly contrasting stimuli, great hopes great disappointments, great riches great poverty, a past heritage that had been invaluable and future prospects that must be brigher still, as the torch was passed from the entrepreneur founders of Nanyang to second generation and the third.”(Hampden-Turner, C 2010)

The program is developed in stages, wherein each of these stages develops the students through various challenges during team-building and idea-building opportunities that force them to look at issues through multiple scopes. The first of these stages is comprised of team-building experiences that cause students to work together to solve issues that are presented uniform to the entire group. They must develop solutions to be as effective and sustainable as possible to show them how they must properly react in a time of need and distress to improve level-headed problem-solving ability.

The second phase of this project was based around the Chinese heritage center on campus. The Nanyang University was the first Chinese University created outside of China. After developing into a school with enrollment of up to 2,324 students in one year, in 1980, Nanyang University was merged with the National University of Singapore. A year later, in 1981, the National Technological Institute (NTI) was developed to help develop engineering students. Finally, in 1991, NTI merged with the National Institute of Education to form Nanyang Technological University (NTU). This name remains for the school through to this day and is the place that allowed for the development of the graduate control group for the TIP students to be compared against. Students were taught the Chinese heritage in depth so they could better understand their ancestors and themselves, in order to understand how to properly develop and advance their communities and business ideas.

The rest of the 16 weeks of the program are an amalgam of hard-work, travel, and practical training with those who are involved in entrepreneurship to mentor them to become successful themselves. Students at this school are not only visited by some of the most successful entrepreneurs, angel investors, venture capitalists, and loan officers, but they also visit some of the most successful regions of the world to better learn proper practice when starting their own business. These students visit Shanghai and Beijing in addition to the West Coast of the United States to visit technology giants to understand the culture and depth of modern companies. The program concludes with students developing their own business plan that is to be presented to venture capitalists. The variety of visits throughout this tour are to show the disparity in the world and how some places require supply innovation and others require demand innovation. Entrepreneurship

comes in many forms, vast in their difference when looking at developed vs developing economies and this tour teaches students how to decide what they believe they are best suited for.

The objectives and results for students are fairly simple in their understanding. The students could be judged based on their success with their ideas, as well as the knowledge they gained from the overall experience. The results for the study, however, were a bit more difficult to measure so they developed a way to measure the success of the study using a grid structure. The grid would appear like the one below:

(0,10)									(10,10)
(0,0)									(10,0)

One criteria would be placed up the left from the origin and the other criteria would be placed across the bottom from the origin. The further in either direction shows there is a bias towards that criteria, with the ideal coupling of the two criteria being at the point (10,10) as seen above. The list of criteria and their results are shown and interpreted below.

Dilemma 1: Intellectuality vs. Experience

The traps placed in this survey were a place where students could either say there were absolutely no feelings involved in their experience at NTU/TIP or they say it was

entirely an emotional journey with no rigor to the coursework. The students who use either of these responses are ruled out of the experiment to ensure accuracy amongst the students who answered within reason. When looking at the students who answered in the top percentile of combining intellectuality and emotion, 44% of TIP students chose this option whereas only 4.4% of NTU students chose it. The implications of this being that the Technopreneurship Institute allows students to experience coursework that will further their knowledge base, while developing EQ that will allow them to develop leadership skills for starting their own company in the future (Hampden-Turner, C 2010).

Dilemma 2: Learning by absorbing top-down information vs. Learning by thinking and acting for yourself

The two pathology traps placed in this survey were for students who said the experience was entirely top down or entirely free spirited in its approach to education. When looking at the students who chose the desired combined statistic of perfectly informative from a top-down perspective while allowing freedom of thought, 2.94% of NTU students vs 32.35% of TIP students chose this option. What this means in regards to the study is that students from the TIP had a stronger ability to combine the information they learned in the classroom with processes from developing a startup. The students showed through their answers regarding the TIP that this method of study allowed them to utilize what they learned in class and apply it to furthering their own business models, rather than regurgitate it in a classroom setting (Hampden-Turner, C 2010).

Dilemma 3: Level playing field for competitive efforts Are we good enough? Vs.

Extended family of brothers and sisters who root for you.

Students were asked to choose whether or not they believed their institutions were seen as a level playing field for students to compete with one another or a place where each student looked to spur innovation in their colleagues. 44% of students from the TIP said they saw the learning experience as a combination of competition with other students while believing their criticisms were also a way to help one another. Only 2.94% of NTU students chose this option with 22% of NTU students saying they believed their educational experience was entirely competitive amongst their colleagues. This realization couples well with the belief seen in dilemma three that they are simply learning from a top down approach. The regurgitative method of learning only in a classroom spurs competition between students because their exams are the only way to set themselves apart from others. This environment does not spur cooperation, whereas the TIP encourages students to criticize one another's work while helping that person develop whatever business model or idea they are looking to produce (Hampden-Turner, C 2010).

Dilemma 4: Serious hard work vs. Playful enjoyment

The next test was directed mainly at the TIP students. To ensure that students did not simply enjoy the TIP because it was seen as a getaway they gave students the options to say if the program was strenuous or too easy and fun. 4.41% of TIP students claimed that their experience was non-stop fun with a distinct lack of actual work. On the contrary, 22% of NTU students actually chose the opposite end of the spectrum claiming that their experience was completely rigorous with no enjoyment wrapped in the

experience. Of the ideal statistic to be chosen which was a stimulating, engaging and enjoyable environment, 50% of TIP students chose this statistic and 0% of NTU students chose this option. While it seems that there should be no place for play in a test comparing two intellectual institutions, entrepreneurship is often a test of dealing with people in other organizations in ways that make your business seem approachable. The ability to enjoy yourself while utilizing your intellect and encourage others to do so will lubricate the wheels of future business development (Hampden-Turner, C 2010).

Dilemma 5: Career continuity and mastering chosen paths vs. Transformation of yourself and reinvention

The last assumption to be tested and surveyed was how these two different institutions trained students intellectually and professionally. Overall, did the institution the student was in provide a career driven curriculum or one that allowed for dynamism in their professional development. 25% of NTU students said they learned everything in a way that directed them into a career path with no other benefits. 10% of TIP members said they learned the exact opposite sentiment as they gained the desire to simply “drop everything” and start something new. The intersection of these two opposing views was chosen by 7% of NTU students and 47% of TIP students.

The overall results of this study are what proved important, not necessarily the individually tested assumptions. What this study showed is not that a standard educational layout/curriculum has no place, but that there can be alternatives for students who prefer a more creative outlet and method of learning. For students who want to learn with a thoroughly structured curriculum and develop their skills for one profession then a competitive environment will more than likely allow them to thrive. A narrow focus

requires an equally narrow curriculum. However, for someone who wants to focus on the development of ideas, innovation and business models they have to be able to think in many different contexts and have a depth of knowledge on many different business aspects (Hampden-Turner, C 2010).

A great example of this can be seen in the TV show Silicon Valley. The entrepreneur protagonists on the show have a great ability to spot issues and come up with solutions for them quickly. In Silicon Valley, one of the characters needed a large investment to build one of their new factories. The response of his boss was to bring him “one of everything on the burger king menu.” After arguing for a while, the employee finally returns with everything from the burger king menu. The boss then begins to explain that they will short the market for sesame seeds because there was about to be a shortage due to an insect infestation that was eating all of the sesame seeds in their largest growing locations. This would allow for the company to see a tenfold investment return that would pay for the development of the new warehouse and leave with profit from the investment overall.

The ability to spot problems like this comes from knowledge that spans many disciplines and the ability to think this way is best fostered through a curriculum designed similar to the TIP. Students must understand history, geography, and the proper resources to best understand their product and how it will fare in all potential markets. Additionally, these students must learn how to problem solve on the fly to develop their businesses successfully and this requires less of a structured curriculum and more of an involved professional experience as seen with these students visiting multiple VC sites.

Chapter 3

Entrepreneurship in Action

Everything depicted in the prior chapters is great for allowing those who are interested in entrepreneurship learn about a linear path. However, after spending the last 4 months applying to, and working at a startup, I can safely say that a linear path is a pipe dream in the startup world.

Fallback to August of 2015 during the beginning of my Sophomore year. After scoring high on our first exams of the year and riding a scholastic high, I began looking for something more. While I enjoyed the classic read and regurgitate method as much as the next student, I knew I needed a creative outlet where I could develop ideas that I believed were important (not unrealistic and self-righteous at all). One night I was sitting in my dorm, angrily studying while my roommate played video games and a friend of mine knocked on the door. He asked me if I was interested in learning more about the project he was working on with an organization called “Enactus.” Initially, the project made no sense to me. They were trying to develop a sort of backpack and jacket combination that would be utilized by the homeless but that was the bulk of information I could understand during that night. He realized the project manager could give me a better explanation of the project so he got me in touch with him via phone call that night.

This phone call is the first introduction I had with entrepreneurship. All other programs at schools welcome any students. If you sign up for a club you are in no matter what (disregard most fraternities and their advanced scouting methods), but this phone call was much more than a routine club sign-up. The project manager put me through the seemingly rigorous vetting process at the time of asking me why I believed the project

was important, what I saw myself doing for the project, and why I qualify to be a part of the team. After relaying on-the-fly answers that were seemingly perfect in my eyes, the project manager gave me a warm welcome. I was officially the communications director for the Bucket project.

My first task after becoming a member of the team was to come to a meeting that same week where they would begin developing the second prototype of the product. The product, as mentioned before, was a combination of a backpack and jacket that could be worn as either or both simultaneously. Being that this was one of the early stages, we were still experimenting with the idea of combining the two products in a way that was simple just to show feasibility. We started by sewing a backpack inside a jacket to see how weight distribution would affect the carrying capacity of the product as a whole. It turns out if you provide no physical support for a backpack that is attached to a jacket via thread, it will sag when you put materials in it. To get around this we began looking to add support to the product via sewing it in different places.

Our next idea was to sew the entirety of the back of the backpack to the jacket to increase support. This turned out to be unsuccessful, in addition to the next 4 iterations of the product. We eventually decided to reincorporate the straps of the backpack and attach the backpack and jacket in just one place to make them two products in one. This simple design made it easy to maintain the cleanliness of the product (if it were to be distributed by relief organizations and returned to them for it to be washed). The product was just half of the issue.

The biggest challenge we had to overcome next was trying to find a way to hire homeless individuals to make the product. Our business model required we hire the

homeless to develop it to maintain sustainability in our model as well as support the homeless even more through a sustainable wage rather than just us handing them this product. We were unfortunately never able to overcome this issue and had to put the project on the back-burner while developing others within the organization.

Being a finance student, I felt a strong urge to land an internship at a financial advising company. In early September of 2017, I got my opportunity when a position opened up at a firm that my friend worked at. After he spoke to the office manager and the CEO of the company, I received an interview opportunity. This rigorous process required 20 minutes of me asking more questions than the office manager asked me, followed by instructions on how to go about getting started with my background check. It's always nice to get the job on the spot, nothing can produce a confidence boost like earning the job immediately. The fact that I only had to surpass one other candidate is a characteristic unnecessary when telling this story in passing.

I took the opportunity and worked there for 3 months through the end of the semester and into my winter break. While the experience was great working alongside the CEO, I quickly realized financial advising was not the position for me. What was the tipping point for me one might ask, after all, I did spend the past 4 years studying the subject? This critical point and realization came after a two week spell of packaging honey to send to our clients. Christmas week following the honey escapade I called Robert. I had always been interested in Fabrikam and saw that they had a finance position open at the time I started looking for new internships.

Robert answered my phone call and began to explain how the finance position was a poor fit for my skill set but he had a better option for me. This is where I had my

first glimpse into the dynamic of hiring at a startup company. The process for hiring at most established companies is very standard. You apply for the job, hear back about an interview time, take a shower, get moderately groomed, put on a suit, show up and then are responded to within a couple weeks if they like you. Your resume is a crucial element to your success in this process and your ability to speak over the phone to get the opportunity to interview in the office determines most of your fate. This process was completely flipped upside down when applying to Fabrikam¹.

The first major difference is the positions that these companies are looking to hire for. Majority of full time positions start as an internship, you DO NOT get hired directly into a position of substantial responsibility. The two main reasons for this are to allow for a thorough vetting process by the founders and to explore the ever-important cultural fit of that individual. To touch on the internship topic, each employee comes on as an intern in the field they are looking to specialize in. An example of this is the acting CFO of the company. He went directly from an internship to the Vice President of Finance for the company. He had the ability to be a CFO for the company, he had more finance experience than the CFO, but what he didn't have was the initial startup experience. Working in an investment bank for 15 years is hectic and hearing his war stories proved that, but working at a startup is a different breed of wild. This satisfies the first criteria of determining that he was a good professional fit for the founders of the company in their ability to gauge if he can manage the daily changes of the startup world, especially in one regarding tech. Making pivot tables and spreadsheets to estimate the amount of monthly

¹ Note that Fabrikam is a pseudo name for the company.

diners is a lot different than creating financial models for established, fortune 500 companies.

The next step is the more important one, however, and that is determining his cultural fit. He is an outstanding worker without a doubt, but so are the other 100 applicants for the position. His success at Fabrikam now hinged upon the criteria of “does he simply fit working with the people in our company.” His “question everything” but simultaneously “remain calm” demeanor answered that question in a heartbeat, of course he was a perfect fit. When dealing with individual investors that have put millions of their dollars into a company, you need someone who is going to remain calm in the wake of sudden change.

When I called Robert and verbally applied to a position at Fabrikam, he did not care about any of my ability as an individual. It helps that he knew me for about a year before this time and spoke to my professors, but this process would have been the same if I were a stranger. According to Robert, “everyone has been to the moon and back on their resume, what I want to know is do you want to show up here every day and do big ****.” This is when I knew the cultural fit was not going to be a problem (for now). Of course I wanted to be there, I was able to work at a startup, dabble into every aspect of business development and even work with the tech team to develop my ability to understand the tech side of the company. It was time to set up an interview with the rest of the executive team.

I went in for my interview at the end of December while still at my finance internship. The first 30 minutes were spent with the Co-founder of the company and the Vice President of finance. After many questions about my family’s business and the

companies I had founded myself, they realized I was a student, but one that was at least willing to put himself on the line and learn while doing so; possibly the two best characteristics for a startup. This was then solidified by Robert when he showed up late to the interview. He spoke to them about how I was such an excellent student and had a massive amount of confidence in my ability. After discussing in private, the team gave me 3 options for my position at the company:

1. Marketing Intern:

- a. I would be working directly with the marketing and sales team to do all the boots on the ground work. The way Fabrikam worked was the sales reps would get restaurants on board with the mission, then once a critical point of restaurants was reached, we would virtually launch a party in that city to gain user traction and brand awareness. If I took the marketing internship, I would have been working directly with the server of these restaurants and owners themselves to ensure the success of Fabrikam in its infant stages in each of these cities.

2. Finance Intern:

- a. If I took this position, I would have been working on payment integration with the Fabrikam app. The way the User Interface of the app worked was each user got one spin of a wheel with all local restaurants on it per day. Depending on any characteristics that effect restaurant occupancy, the user would get a large discount at one restaurant, and a 10% discount at all others. The user would then go to the restaurant, type the servers name in, confirm their discount and show the discount amount to the server. From

here, the server would take the discount off the bill and the entire transaction was complete. This, however, was a very big issue with Fabrikam because users couldn't pay on the app. Simply having to show your server the app was not enough to convince some of these users to actually use the app. The company realized this and decided to go to credit card integration so users could just pay on the app if they wanted and bypass the manual process of presenting the discount to the server and hoping they calculate it properly.

- b. This is the process I was most interested in. For a year leading up to this interview I would always speak to my business partner about how archaic the process for receiving the discount was. I frequently stated "imagine how much more popular Fabrikam would be if you could just pay and include a tip right on your phone. I mean, I don't even know when to show the discount I have received or anything, there's no direction." Couple this with my experience with the family business and my drive for finance and it seemed like the perfect fit for me at the company. This leads me into the third position

3. Contoso² Coordinator

- a. Remember when I said that Robert had another idea in mind, well this was it. After about 5 minutes of semi-begging for the finance intern position I was talked into the "you are the CEO of this new company we are incubating" mindset and fell for Contoso. I waited 2 years to be able to run

² Contoso is the fictitious name given to the project to help preserve anonymity.

my own company, why would I not want to take one that is already set up for me? It turns out, if you are talked into a job by the CEO saying he will make you the “president of the company upon graduation”, yet you receive business cards that say “intern”, you should probable question your validity. Regardless, I was excited to leave my old job and experience the sweatshirt-wearing, ping pong culture of a tech startup.

This interview was supposed to last about 45 minutes with the executive of the company, this 45 minutes, however, turned into 4 hours. That makes me two for two regarding on-the-spot job offers for anyone who is counting. After speaking to the executive team for about an hour, the Marketing Director for the company took me to the office deli where I received my first, company paid meal in my internship history, things were looking up. Afterwards, we came back and ate with the team where I received a brief introduction to those I would be working with upon my official arrival. If there is one thing Fabrikam had, it was an incredible team. All young, charismatic people with talents that span the gambit of everything that is required to make a tech startup work.

My lunch and introductions were interrupted early, however, when a group of 2 people showed up to the office. These were two uber drivers, ready to be brought into the Contoso Community. Real quick, Contoso is the company I was being thrown into at a moment’s notice and told to “run.” My job was to bring as many drivers into the office and deploy tablets to all of them. The idea being, all the passengers behind these tablets are an engaged audience so we could sell ad space on these tablets to local companies. All these ads are geocentric so if a company only wanted to be seen in a certain part of

DC at a certain time, we could provide that. To provide this ad space however, we first had to onboard drivers.

I had to immediately take the tie and jacket off to do anything I could to look like I fit at Contoso and that this wasn't my first day. I sat in on the onboarding meeting between Robert and the two drivers and got possibly the most incredible experience I could have received within my first hour. First of all, experiencing Robert's sales pitch was a great learning experience. Being the incredible salesman he was, the instant connection with the driver was made and they were hooked on the company and our mission before even sitting down in the meeting. The way he transitioned between tones and topics to engage the drivers was flawless, very similar to how I was talked into taking the position. As the meeting came to an end, however, the two drivers mentioned that they were the admin's for a facebook group of Rideshare drivers. At this point, all our company had was about 45 drivers and a great referral system that was not producing the expected, exponential growth predicted by the \$50 referral incentive. Robert noticed this opportunity and immediately offered them whatever they needed to provide to their group so that they could refer as many drivers to us as possible. The more drivers we had, the more impressions on passengers, the more ad space we could sell and in turn, the more money we made. Within 30 minutes we had a personalized flyer developed for their group and an incredible referral program for their group of 300 drivers. This was our first "business-to-business" transaction within the company one could say. After these two drivers left, I went to speak to the team again and get a better idea of both companies and how they are run. Learning the roles of each member was going to be crucial in finding my way through this confusing, matrix organization. My 4-hour interview had then come

to an end when I told everyone I had to leave to get back to Frederick before rush hour started. I was never paid for those 4 hours.

After a week of explaining to my finance internship that I had to leave, I finally had my first day at Fabrikam. My inaugural day was a half day (started at noon) where I walked into a team of about 10 guys sitting in our main conference room with 100 tablets in front of them. Four of these guys were from Sprint, and the rest were from our company. The process they were developing revolved around what settings needed to be changed to allow our app to operate properly on the tablet.

The Contoso app was developed in India by a company named Qburst. They created the Development App (Dev app for short), which is the app all of the executives of the company had on their tablets. This app was always one version ahead of what our drivers had on their tablets in the Product App (Prod app for short). The dev app allowed for the executive team and development team to tinker with new features without updating the app that the rideshare drivers had on their tablets. After the changes that the executive team wanted were solidified, the prod app would be changed and ready to update. However, for any of these app installations on the tablet or app updates to go smooth, certain settings on the tablet itself had to be set up properly.

After the proper settings were changed like wifi, Bluetooth, auto-updates, and notifications, the tablets were ready for us to manually place the APK file onto the tablet. The APK file is the “Android Package Kit” that we would install onto the tablet. In short, this was the app that we would load onto the tablet by dragging and dropping from our computers, after receiving the app from the development team. The process that was finalized from the meeting I mentioned goes as follows:

1. Change necessary settings on the tablet (done by Sprint but checked by us when receiving batches of tablets)
 - a. This was amazing for two reasons. The first being our team was able to talk Sprint into manually changing all the settings of the tablets for us before delivery. The second reason being that Sprint messed up just about 50% of the tablets they sent, I guess this is what led to the name “Just in Case” Robert.
2. Install the APK via hardwiring the tablet to our laptops and copying the file over to internal storage.
3. Charge the tablets and ensure the proper launcher is set on the app.
 - a. Contoso, the app, was not just an app, but a launcher as well. This means that the tablet would turn on and launch the app immediately instead of the home screen or any other apps on the tablet. However, the process of making this the launcher was manual and if it was ignored, any passenger could easily get out of the app.

The reason all of this process is crucial is because of the updates and passenger interference mentioned above. If the passengers could leave the app, then the app would not send “location pings” to our database every two minutes. If the tablet sends no pings to our database, then we have no location data to show to companies we are looking to sell advertising to. If the tablet does not have certain settings pre-determined, “unknown sources on” in particular, then whenever the app would update, the driver or passengers could leave the app. After our first update and the amount of people that exited the app,

we made it a priority to develop the app in a way that it could not be exited no matter what happened.

The first transition I had to make was to now wake up at 5am to get ready and leave my house before six to allow for a reasonable commute down 495. For those who don't know, the trip down 32, to 95, to 495 after 6am is possibly the worst trip you could make anywhere in the world. 32, a two lane road, is one of the largest funnel roads into the beltway around DC which leads to stop and go traffic for about an hour before even reaching the beltway. After reaching the beltway, you are fashionably late for that traffic so you get to experience no break from the bumper of the person in front of you. This was then topped off by a 30 minute stretch of road that was approximately 5 miles long. Even Waze can't reduce your commute by enough to make this commute reasonable, but my excitement allowed me to almost enjoy the ride.

At the end of my first day (the half day mentioned above), I was formally introduced to another intern at Fabrikam. He was a long-time family friend of Robert's and had worked with Fabrikam since the beginning. He was going to be the one that was going to help me with Contoso until he had to go back to school on the 15th.

I showed up on the third of January (at this point I was working every day of the week because I was still on winter break) ready to start my day by calling all drivers who were expected to show up that day. The double confirmation process for calling these drivers was vital, if we did not constantly pester these drivers then they would not come in. On days with many RSVP's, I would call drivers on the way to work to make my commute that much more exciting.

This process of calling drivers introduced me to a pair of very important pieces of technology: Hubspot and Calendly. Hubspot is a CRM, of which we used the free version, that separates any individual contacts or businesses that you look to be in contact. In addition to keeping these contacts in a database (I will speak mainly about contacts because I don't work directly with companies), Hubspot would allow for any metrics to be reported about these drivers so that filtering through them could be made simple. If I needed to search for a rideshare driver on our platform based on their tablet number, RSVP date, or even referral I could through this platform. The beauty of the platform, is that it was linked to our websites landing page through a software called Zappier. This allowed for any information put into our websites landing page to be auto-transmitted into Hubspot. This means that when a driver was referred to our website, they would fill out all their information and it would immediately make that person a contact in Hubspot. This allowed for easy filtering through "hot leads" (leads that could be transitioned into customers), and filtering through current drivers in case we needed to get in touch with them. A lot of what I experienced was taking multiple platforms and finding ways to integrate them to make daily operations easier which is crucial for the agility of a startup company.

Calendly, our RSVP software was equally important. We directly imported a widget on our website that allowed for those who received our RSVP link to set a time to come into the office and receive their tablet. Quick tangent, for any driver to receive the RSVP email and link, they had to match certain criteria when initially signing up on our homepage. These criteria were filtered through by a software called mailchimp that would auto email people as long as they matched our required criteria. Calendly, would

then send a reminder to that drivers email and respective calendar that they have a meeting time, while also auto-populating the office calendar with their RSVP time so we would know who to contact that day and double-confirm with.

After getting a better grasp of how the tech side worked and double-confirming these drivers on my second day, the process of me “running” the company began. The other intern and myself go to listen to Robert onboard drivers only two or three more times before we were let loose to do it on our own. Joey and I became incredibly quick and efficient with the onboarding process. We set the record for most drivers onboarded in one day (8 drivers) only a week into our position. We continued to produce similar numbers for the rest of January, until the 15th when the other intern left.

Chapter 4

Change of Pace

The other intern leaving was the first experience I had with the truly fast-paced nature of startups. The amount of drivers coming in on a daily basis began to drop dramatically because not only did he leave, but I was now only in the office Monday, Wednesday, and Friday because I had to be back at school. Needless to say, I had a meeting with Robert shortly after on what was wrong.

The meeting was fairly standard, but also much more straightforward than any other meetings I had been a part of. It started with Robert telling me I needed to increase the amount of drivers we had coming or else I would be moved positions. “I am a firm believer in doing what you’re good at, and immediately quitting what you’re bad at because it’s a waste of all of our times. Do I need to come back and work with you to get more drivers into this office? I will if we need to but at this point I should not have anything to do with drivers or their issues” Robert said. I reassured him the reason we were having an issue is because I lost my partner with onboarding and dropped the amount of hours I had been working because I went to three days a week (33 hours a week approximately). This satisfied him for now which gave me ample time to get back to my desk and brainstorm how I could go about doing my job more efficiently before I lost my job.

Surprisingly, the first solution I came up with actually worked and it was a trick I learned from my old sales positions. The approach I began to use was a very immediate and servant approach with drivers that had recently signed up. I would contact drivers as soon as they signed up, before the RSVP link even reached them (the RSVP link was on a

5 hour delay so we could vet the drivers). If I saw this person reached the criteria, then I would call them and let them know that we would compensate them for coming in on the exact day that they signed up. I went from onboarding about 2 drivers a day, back to 6 or 7 simply by making them feel important and developing a rapport that would bring them into the office. I became ecstatic and knew I had to tell Robert, I needed the team to know I was back to being capable of building the company I was put in charge of. This quickly taught me two things. The first is that you won't ever be right in a startup because there is an odd mix of constantly needing to change but also no one should overstep the boundaries of the process that is in place. It was great that I was bringing more drivers in, but at the expense of contacting them before the RSVP email was virtually a federal offense. The other thing it taught me is that if you are titled "intern" and are working on a small, incubated company and expect those working on the parent company to care, you are sadly mistaken.

I was told I had a team to help with whatever needed after I had the meeting with Robert about declining driver numbers. So, I asked our sales representatives to sit in on a meeting where I onboarded a driver. My idea was that if I am not there to onboard a driver, these sales representatives for Fabrikam could onboard the drivers for me so we could get back to a 5 day of the week schedule for driver onboarding. Well this proposal was met with an "absolutely not, I don't want to know anything about Contoso because I don't want to have to work on that" by one of the sales assistants. Needless to say, I went back to working alone and not worrying about help, which I was fine with. I wasn't dubbed the "Contoso President, Intern" for no reason.

Not long after this time, I managed to get a friend of mine hired there as a finance intern. He was given the same treatment as myself. He wasn't exactly what they were looking for but he was qualified in some way, so they made him do the basic financial functions for Fabrikam, while spending most of his time working with me to onboard as many drivers as possible for Contoso. At this point, the only people working on Contoso were myself, my friend, and the founders of the company. Now that we had both of us working on onboarding, the amount of drivers began to increase to about 5 per day again and everyone was happy with that metric. This is when I was given the chance to really focus on any changes that needed to be made to the processes we had in place, or the actual app itself.

The first process I streamlined was our referral payout process. At this point, we had many drivers who had referred others and earned a payment for doing so, but no automatic system to track these payments. I developed an inputting system where drivers were labeled certain ways in our database if they had a check earned, a check written, or a check distributed to them so we could keep track of how much money has been paid to each driver. We still had to manually write these checks to our drivers, but we now had a process to know we were not double-paying drivers or skipping any drivers that needed to be paid. Without this process, drivers would develop a very negative outlook towards our company if they were promised referral payments and we did not deliver and it was vital during our early development that all drivers were on board with our mission.

The next process we focused on streamlining was checking the dev app before releasing any changes to the prod app. In previous versions, we would release the prod version and hope for the best. We would then get the list of drivers that did not have a

successful update and contact those drivers to troubleshoot through their issues. The process we developed after this was to update the dev app, with everyone on the dev team, exec team, and myself updating in different ways. Some would cancel the update, some would go through normally, and others would do anything they could to interrupt the process. From this, we learned what could go wrong and how to troubleshoot before releasing the prod update. Additionally, this process was important because it allowed us to see what changes needed to be made in the future when updating the app to minimize failure with updating. The less drivers updated, the less location pings we get, the less impressions we can sell to advertisers.

Not long into the time that my friend began to work on developing this company with me, we were asked to do some data analysis on our competitors and the market we were in. We not only developed a report that allowed us to see the scalability of our product to the next largest neighboring city, but also developed an entire competitive analysis on companies doing something similar to what we were doing.

The ability to penetrate the market was looking very optimistic. There were no other companies doing anything similar in our next prospective market, meaning all 185,000 rideshare drivers were at our ready. The issue with having 185,000 rideshare drivers available is finding those that drive full time. It is only in our best interest to find those that are full time because these are the drivers that produce the most impressions. Companies we are looking to sell ad space to would not be willing to pay the prices we were asking, knowing that all we have are part-time drivers that have the tablet sitting idle for most of their week.

Digression to follow:

Price is another aspect of this that allowed for some assumptions to be tested, assumptions that could make this entire opportunity very lucrative. Since this was a new innovative way to sell advertising space, it allowed us to be “price makers” in this market. Couple this with the deals we have made with cellular providers and becoming cash flow positive within a year was very possible and this is extremely rare in the startup space. If we wanted to charge monthly, we could do so. If we wanted to charge a one-time fee to a company for a certain period of time we could do that as well.

The tablet is extremely engaging with the trivia and other games that we put on it. Allowing passengers to see offers for products or services from local companies, right after playing trivia and while being stuck in the car meant we had some great measurable statistics to sell to advertisers. While this idea originally was developed with a top-down approach in the sense that our company saw a profit opportunity and hoped advertisers would hop on board, it actually made sense for them to do so. This top-down approach actually working is something that typically does not work in the startup world, especially with the entrepreneurship ventures I had seen fail in the past. Luckily, since this was an ad-space disruptor, we could take advantage of this opportunity and successfully sell it, at least to small companies.

Digression complete.

After developing the report for expansion to the next biggest metropolitan area, we began to focus on our competitors. Luckily, none were there yet, but we knew we would run into competitors after that when expanding to larger cities. The report we developed had the top 8 competitors that were doing something similar to us. Approximately 4 of these produced no information for us to see, while the others were

able to fundraise and produce a product that we most certainly would have to be better than. In the midst of developing this competitor analysis, our CEO walks in and asked us how it was going. We promptly told him that we would easily have it done by the deadline later that evening and we could not wait to present it to him and the co-founder. He responded with something that was very surprising to me and that was “isn’t it amazing how dumb all of these companies are?” My friend and I were taken back, that seemed like a very ignorant and biased statement to come from the CEO of a company. When has calling competitors ideas “dumb” in the past worked when developing your own business?

Later that day the executives had finished their annual reviews. The last person they reviewed was our graphic designer and about 15 minutes into the review they had two different presentations air playing on the conference room television. Both were competitor profiles, one was ours and the other was one he put together. Since we submitted the competitor analysis to the CEO, he had the graphic designer put some cool themes and font colors on it before we went over the analysis that evening. When we were invited in, the CEO, CRO, and Graphic designer were going over his analysis. His analysis consisted of the company’s name, mission statement, and goals. It was for 2 different companies and he and his wife had put it together over the weekend. They provided little to no information on our competitors but by god our CEO was ecstatic over the fact that our graphic designer spent 30 minutes over the weekend thinking about the company. This boss-pleasing mentality and ignorance of actual data appeared quite often throughout my experience.

After we went over the rest of the 3-slide competitor analysis the graphic designer had completed, we went over the competitor analysis that myself and my friend had made. Of course, the presentation started with “DANG! Look how good *graphic designer* made this look! What a beast y’all need to take notes” but shortly after we got into our analysis. The first two companies we went over were not much of a threat, they either were not looking to provide a similar product that we were or had so little information and market penetration that it did not matter. However, we reached a company that was providing tablets to rideshare drivers, but they produced much of their own content. They offered live streaming of local events and had other videos that were sponsored by local companies and media outlets to be put on the tablets as well. This analysis was met with a “theyre not that big, we do not need to worry about them.” Onto the next company.

After a couple more insignificant companies, we came to a company that had an interesting idea. They would provide the tablets to their drivers and then would pay their drivers to update the content on the tablets once a month via the USB that the company sent to the drivers. The USB would contain new ads or media for the tablets and the drivers would be compensated anywhere between \$20 and \$50 each time they updated the tablet. “How dumb is that, these drivers can’t even update the app we provide, do you actually expect them to update the tablet with a USB file?” What makes this one most interesting is the fact that we had about 33% of our drivers on an old version (not updated). You would think maybe we would see that you need to make content updates incentive compatible for the drivers and take notes from a company that did this successfully. Instead, we sat in a room bashing how dumb this idea was.

We reached the final company, the one that had the largest presence in the markets we were looking to penetrate. This company not only provided the most presentable platform, but also had a few innovative features that would benefit passengers and drivers more so than any other company we saw. They had a feature that would allow for recording of the passenger (used for proof of impressions to advertisers I'm sure) and a feature that would allow for card information to be swiped directly onto the tablet to tip their driver and not go through the rideshare company. Drivers loved this because they knew exactly how much of a tip they should receive, while benefitting from the advertising on the tablet. This is the part that set this company apart from others. Drivers took home a cut of the per-impression cost structure of the advertising. This meant that they made money 3 different ways while driving with this in their car (ad-rev, trip-rev and tips). In addition to making a superior product, this company also was in the midst of a large fundraising round that showed their growth and vision was inevitable.

The presentation had a hard cut-off time of 6:45 so we ended it promptly after speaking about this competitor. Within minutes the CEO had left as well as the co-founder. During this week of the annual reviews, not much was said to my friend and myself. Everyone seemed to be acting as though we were some strange figures around the office and became a little hostile at points. We realized something was going on that night and were interested to see what came of it the Monday after during the entire team meeting.

Chapter 5

Strategic Pivots

The next vignette I would like to talk about, however, is a strategic pivot. One that was much more groundbreaking for our company than something on the operational level. It's much easier to sit back as an intern and view everything that happens within the company. You are requested by most of the employees whenever they need you to complete a quotidian task but the beauty of this is you get to ask everyone about their experience so far with the company. Being constantly bombarded with work by people from all departments is expected and even more so invited in my case as I wanted to know every detail of the company since its inception.

One day my friend and I walked into the office, however, and things were different. All of the supplies we ordered for an upcoming event of ours had been moved, the office was quiet and us two interns were not engaged nearly to the degree that we were before. Our remarks were met with short answers by most employees and before we knew it, 8 hours of individual employee meetings began. Each employee got pulled in one-by-one to be spoken to by the C level executives of the company and we were given no status update on what was going on. As it turned out, our gut feeling was correct.

Monday came around and my friend and I finally received the official word from the CEO of what was going on in the company. Our suspicions as to why everyone was acting the way that they were became solidified. The parent company, Fabrikam, was being put on hold and the whole company was pivoting to the rideshare company my

friend and I were incubating. The annual reviews were meetings where they were telling employees what their new responsibilities will be after they pivot. This makes sense as to why we were not involved in the meeting for a few reasons. The first reason being: we already knew our responsibilities. Nothing we were doing was going to change after the pivot. We will now just have an entire team helping us with everything we were looking to do before regarding onboarding of drivers and expansion into new markets. Another reason being if they are bringing more people onto the team, it is easier to let us continue what we are doing (being that we were interns) and give higher ranking jobs to those that were already in the company. They have the skills for sales and market growth, promote them within the new company and let us find our way in afterwards.

Immediately after the promotions and reviews were complete, we were notified that the sales representatives from Philadelphia and New York were coming to headquarters for a month. When they got here, there was a company wide meeting where everyone besides myself and my friend got the entire rundown about what Contoso is. Everyone was taught about the tech side regarding how the tablets were to be set up and what we were looking to implement on the tablet. In addition to this, the sales reps were trained on what their next steps were going to be. Instead of selling restaurants on Fabrikam, they would now be either selling ad space to local companies or onboarding drivers in their respective cities. In order to onboard drivers in their cities, however, we first had to develop best practices in D.C.

For the first week that the other sales representatives were there, we spent most of our time in meetings coming up with how we will contact leads and how we will go look for new ones. We took some of the best practices I had developed over the last two

months and then expanded on them. This new process with more team members would allow for more of our leads to be turned into active drivers simply because we had more people able to put their effort towards contacting drivers. We also now had team members that were available to travel around the area to see where the best places to find rideshare drivers are. If we knew where they were, then we could simply bring any equipment we needed to onboard drivers directly to them.

Our sales reps started off their second week at local airports in cell phone lots. These cell phone lots were where most drivers would wait to get a ride from the airport to take them into a city, where they would then start their day of driving. The idea was that these drivers start here to get a big trip then make their quick stops in the city afterwards to increase the volume of their trips. Most of the bonuses provided by these rideshare companies are based on the amount of trips these drivers would do. You start the day with a trip that is long and makes you good money, then focus the rest of your day on getting bonuses to add extra cash to your weekly payout.

Our sales reps found that these cell phone lots were great places to find drivers, however, these lots are also patrolled often, believe it or not, the government doesn't want people knocking on car windows by an airport. What they like even less is a guy walking around an airport with nothing besides a tablet that has a 5 second, ticking countdown once every minute. Fabrikam had to bail people out for loitering, I'm not sure they had the money to bail someone out for public endangerment. Regardless, our sales team came back with good data for us to come up with a plan on how to penetrate these lots without drawing too much heat to ourselves. These members would show up to the cell phone lots at airports and observe from 7am-11am just how many rideshare drivers

would enter the lot. These drivers were easily identifiable because of the regulations that require rideshare drivers to make their contracting companies logo visible to any passengers. After a critical mass of rideshare drivers entered the lot they were in, they would begin knocking on windows and pitching the idea on the spot. We went back to all these local airports and began handing out referral cards to drivers. We would incentivize them to come to the office with a gift card and we saw some success with these efforts, but not much. I had one driver come in and I think we had a total of less than 10 drivers from these cell phone lots actually make it down to the office.

Another place we looked to give out tablets were at offices and hubs for these rideshare drivers. If we knew where they would go to complain or to get their issues fixed, and these drivers had many issues on a daily basis, then we could just sit and wait to hand out these tablets. Is this soliciting, yes, but it's nothing we haven't been bailed out for before. Our first stop was to a local hub to see how many drivers we could encounter or if there was someone in the office that we could potentially partner with to send any drivers our way. At the end of the day, we were providing an increased ROI for these rideshare companies by making a better passenger experience. As it turns out, these rideshare companies keep everything to themselves and do not give you any information as to who you could contact for a partnership like this. All we left with that day was a picture of the top 20 drivers in that city based on trips and ratings.

On the advertising side, we only had two people selling ads. The first person was the CEO who naturally had to do this. The CEO, arguably one of the best sales reps in the DMV area, could sell water to a fire hydrant. Majority of the second sales reps job, was to get leads and meetings to the CEO so that he could work his magic. The CEO's ability

to remember even the most minute details of a conversation and pick up on something someone values before they even speak made him extremely well liked and compassionate. People immediately loved him making the sale inevitable, before the person even knew what they were buying. Some of the most amazing aspects of his pitch and presentation to potential stakeholders were as follows:

1. Tone of voice

- a. His tone of voice would change instantaneously and perfectly to fit any situation or person he was speaking to. Even if there were multiple people in the room, he would know which tone would best suit the person who would have the largest stake in the deal. If a rideshare driver came in, he was extremely laid back and buddy-buddy. If an advertiser came in, they may as well have been best friends. If someone of importance came in regarding a business partnership, he was immediately the expert in the office and demanded some of the best deals, even without leverage.

2. His approach to people

- a. When an advertiser walks in the door and our office dog greets them, he would say simple things like “he’s shy and only greets some people”, this seems insignificant, but goes a long way when selling ads to some of these companies. If they know they are welcomed by him as a friend and even the office dog, then the pitch will basically be Robert telling these advertisers that we are looking to do them a favor by selling them space on

the tablet. His ability to switch to servant leadership towards these people interested in advertising deals was amazing. Letting them know they have the “first bid” on certain space at a discounted price because of how well they fit our mission was a great tactic to gain buy-in and he used it well. Also, going back to our ability to be price makers, he could manipulate this in any way to get people to join. Constantly approaching advertisers with information about their headquarters and city showed them that he did truly care about their ads being on the tablet.

3. His confidence

- a. I have never seen someone get off the phone with every single potential shareholder and tell us that there is “something wrong” if he can’t sell them an ad. He could turn a 5 minute phone call into a face-to-face meeting and signed contract within a day depending on the advertisers schedule.

My assumption is that all of these skills had been developed through his history in marketing and presentations to board members. If you go into a board meeting without even one of the characteristics mentioned above, the odds of keeping your company’s capital can diminish quite fast. Our CEO was so strong with these three characteristics that he could talk the head investors out of more capital in the midst of a bankruptcy if he had to.

After two weeks had gone by, we began to have pretty consistent success with onboarding drivers each day, even surpassing the previous record of drivers in one day. Since the sales reps were there, however, I had begun working on more of the back-end

jobs while they did most of the onboarding. One of the major jobs that I wanted to tackle while the sales reps were there was account management. Now that we had ample people focusing on bringing drivers into the office and getting tablets installed in their cars, we needed someone to focus on keeping these drivers happy and making sure they are reaching the minimum requirements that we asked for number of trips per month.

One of the biggest issues that I noticed about Fabrikam and spoke to one of the employees about was the account management aspect of the company. Around the office there was constant talk about how stubborn these restaurant owners were and how they never paid, yet I never heard of anyone directly maintaining consistent contact with them to ensure Fabrikam got paid. We would hope that the checks would come in and each week we would get a few letters from restaurants that were looking to leave our platform. As it turns out, we had our sales representatives maintaining contact with current restaurant owners while they were out selling to new restaurants. If they were out in a city selling to restaurants, and the CRO called talking about one of the restaurants complaining, then the sales reps would have to go and fix the situation. There are a few issues with this model. The first is that sales representatives, especially in a startup, need to focus completely on growth. They need to be able to move fast and be successful at growing, in this case, the amount of restaurants on our platform to increase the amount of money our company brings in each month. The second issue is exactly the fact that they are sales representatives and with that comes a certain expected mentality. When they initially show up to a restaurant and sell the product, they sell all the intricacies of the contract as well. If you ask them to go back and deal with an angry restaurant owner then they are going to be angry because in their minds “the owner knew what he was signing

up for!” You need someone who is more composed to work on account management to maintain close relationships and positive cash flow.

I began to work with the CFO and co-founder to develop ways that we could streamline anything on the back-end and maintain contact with these drivers so we have solid numbers to sell to advertisers. The first step of the process was to develop a way to check in on our drivers and ensure they are reaching our minimum requirements. We came up with a process where we would check active tablet hours on our back end and after two weeks warn drivers that were below 50% of our monthly requirement. This process would include a phone call, email, and a text message if there was no way for us to leave a voicemail after the phone call. This was not only good for getting drivers attention because they often see text notifications while driving, but it also doubled as security for the company. Another warning was sent two weeks later as the month was coming to an end. If the drivers were completely inactive we would threaten to charge them the full price of the tablet as defined in their contract. This was done under the assumption that if the tablet is inactive, this person has taken it and has no intention on using it for rideshare driving anymore and we want to cover the cost on our end. If drivers were active but not reaching our required metrics then we would send them a warning message that we would have to charge the leasing fee laid out in their contract. Our data showed that expecting the minimum that we did was completely realistic for all markets we had acquired at the moment so any drivers that were unable to meet this metric should be charged because it does not make sense for us to provide them a tablet from an advertisers perspective.

Most of the time, we did not receive responses from those drivers that we threatened to charge full price for the tablet. These drivers more than likely took the tablet and went AWOL, meaning we would just charge them and cut our losses. When we did receive responses from them, they were usually extremely enthralled when they heard my voice, they knew they could let me have it with angry messages if we try to charge them. Regardless, I was usually able to talk them down and let them know they can avoid the charges if they just returned the tablet to us or kept in touch with us to let us know if they would begin driving again soon.

The drivers that we were sending the leasing fee message too were usually fairly responsive (about a 60% success rate in contacting them over the 5% success rate of contacting the full price charged drivers). Being that I was the first point of contact for majority of these drivers and Contoso, I had developed a relationship with them. When I would call them they would answer on a friendly, first name basis and we could talk as though we were friends. Some I must say I would consider friends, it was always fun when they would show up to the office and we could play ping pong and shoot the breeze. When I would call them about monthly driving warnings, it was easy to get the information we needed from them. They would quickly let me know it was a family emergency that kept them from driving or they would update me on the status of their driving. We truly did not want to charge these drivers a leasing fee, it wasn't our intention to be on these drivers about their hours. We wanted great relationships with our drivers because they were the life-blood of the company, without them we have no ad space. We were very lenient with them if they were close to, or below our threshold as

long as they showed they were active. Blockbuster would be disappointed for us not charging leasing fees.

That was one process down, the next that needed streamlining was our referral program. With the amount of drivers being onboarded everyday becoming upwards of 200% what it was before, we needed to figure this issue out quickly. Before, when it was just myself and my friend working on the company, it was just a one-week strategic delay on referral payments. Now that we had 3 more people working on driver onboarding and a miscommunication of whose job was whose, these same referral payments were up to 3 weeks late at points. This means we would have up to 20 different drivers waiting for referrals for up to three weeks and this certainly does not fare well for the relationships that I had with the drivers that I spoke about earlier. As the CEO said, “you have your word and that’s it.”

From this, we had our software engineer develop a way for drivers to input their debit card information directly into our system and we could pay them automatically. It would eventually be integrated with the database where all of our referrals show up, but for the time being, we would go onto their account in the office and directly deposit the money onto their card rather than have each driver come in to get a physical check.

The next process that I had to focus on was developing ways to keep drivers engaged. Our main way was through Facebook at the time where we would post at least once a day with new drivers onboarded or bonuses for our drivers. These posts were beginning to lose their appeal, however, so we knew we had to begin to deliver more. From this, our DC director came up with the idea to have “driver fuel ups” every Wednesday. These started out from 8:30 to 11:30, but this clearly did not work because

that was the rush hour times that most of our drivers were at work. The first driver fuel up we had, no drivers showed up for the event. Drivers showed up during that time for referral checks and just happened to stumble upon our coffee and donuts, it was time to market this a little better.

The first thing we did for driver fuel ups was to change the time to 10:30-1:30pm, in hopes that drivers would be in between morning and evening rush hour and looking for a pick-me-up. More drivers began to show up at these times but there still needed to be more of an incentive to get these drivers to come into the office. My job was to come up with creative ideas to get drivers into the office and there was no better way to do so than with a promise of a daily prize being given out. If a driver would show up to a Wednesday Fuel Up then we could have competitions and the winners would receive one of the seemingly 5,000 gift cards we had left over in the office.

In addition to this, I worked with the CRO and Communications Director to develop a social media schedule where we would plan what to post to our Facebook page each week. These posts would hopefully allow us to gain more traction within our driver community again, as we wanted drivers to be engaged to encourage them to drive more. We came up with a schedule that had at least one post per day except for Sunday. This would keep drivers engaged with all of those that are new to our page and all of our original drivers. They would begin to help each other with our tablet and rideshare driving as a whole to make sure one another succeeds. Being able to provide this first-hand information to advertisers is huge. Knowing they are placing their ads into a product where those who are promoting it are working to develop their advertising base by

themselves is huge. Testimonials are the cherry on top as to why advertisers should be on board.

The most recent month we have hit an incredible amount of milestones regarding tablet engagement and driving hours. We are reaching tens of thousands of trivia questions answered over the course of a weekend showing that passenger engagement is beginning to increase as a percentage of total time that the tablet is on in these rideshare drivers' vehicles. In addition to this, we are constantly onboarding more drivers with the implementation of Facebook ads. With the addition of Facebook ads where we begin to send ads directly to rideshare drivers who spend majority of their time on their phone and Facebook groups, we began to see upwards up 30 drivers scheduled to come into the office in one day. At a 50% turnover, we saw the size of our company increase by almost 100% in just a month after moving our sales team to onboarding. The issue came with keeping up with selling ad space.

Without a substantial amount of coverage in the markets we were in it was difficult to sell ad space. Our drivers, passengers and investors were looking for us to increase the amount of ads we were selling and our capacity to do so was just evolving due to our new methods of driver obtainment. Since we now had a streamlined process for driver onboarding, we could now take the talent from driver acquisition and place it in the ads department. We began by calling all companies that were advertising in local magazines and newspapers. If they were willing to still pay a premium for print ads, then it makes no sense why they wouldn't pay to be on our platform. Our ads were targeted at their audience and were able to be tracked and measured. We provided a marketing

solution in a new space to some of the largest advertisers in the area and could set our own price.

Developing our ad team to 4 employees compared to the two we started with allowed for exponential growth on the ads side. Everything on the driver's side was on auto-pilot, it was time to make this the case with ads. We strategically built up a few contracts to act as leverage when going into new contract deals. This created urgency for these companies to sign their contracts and in turn, a higher price point for us to sell. Within a week we had a list of 450 companies that we could potentially sell ad space to. This space could be for companies as a whole or even just certain events that the company wanted to hold.

Just before the end of my study, Contoso had over 450 deployed tablets and a few substantial ad deals signed that proved a proper pivot in the company had been completed. The fact that this pivot completely changed the company and was done so successfully in a month speaks to the efficacy of the team at Contoso/Fabrikam.

Julian Orr, in his landmark text "talking about machines" describes the job of a Xerox service technician in the 80's as a continuous highly skilled improvisation within a triangular relationship of technician, customer, and machine. The modern "tech job" in his day involved an ongoing communication that shifted with nuances and evolving maintenance of expensive, specialized machinery. In Orr's text the mundane daily tasks were the preparation of materials, impromptu conversations, and loose collaborations of service technicians trying to solve machine specific problems. Pivots only came sporadically and when they did they were industry changing (Orr, J.E.1996).

Your modern tech job for 2018, however, could very well be described by the employees I spent most of my time with. The amount of dynamism in their daily operations and ways of thinking in order to ensure the success of their companies and products is incredible. Within a week after the pivot, their exacting level of focus on detail had made the effect of the pivot on their psyche short-lived. The CEO had a mission and the task level employees had this mission properly cascaded down to them in a way that made their goals very tangible. When given these tangible goals, they immediately began brainstorming how to make that goal a shortcoming of the talent they could actually provide.

So what is the takeaway? Studies like the Singapore experiment show that there is large facet of entrepreneurship that is dynamism; entrepreneurs must be able to problem solve on the fly while inviting the risk of running into these issues. Sitting in a classroom does not allow for this experience to unfold so to learn entrepreneurship, you have to do it. Some students do so by starting their own companies and others do so by going through school-sponsored semesters that act as an in-house YC Combinator (Hampden-Turner, C. 2010). Regardless of how these students go about doing it, they need to be exposed to the common issues that come with entrepreneurship to see if it fits them, and not just the fruits of the labor that are portrayed on so many social media sites.

My route to understanding entrepreneurship was one that fit the above description very well. I knew that I wanted to run my own company one day so why not see what it is like now? I had a couple attempts of starting my own company that failed and decided it would be best for me to see rapid growth in action at a local startup. Throughout this journey I learned those crucial factors that are laid out so well in all of the studies

presented on entrepreneurship. Some factors being the formation of roles and teams, fundraising, business development, or most importantly, pivots. While learning this first hand and after studying scholarly articles, it seemed like a good time to begin looking at other people's stories.

My desire to understand the stories of others is what led to me reading *Chaos Monkeys* so I could see how my experience stacked up to someone who had successfully sold a company. As it turns out, there were a lot of similarities (minus the Wall Street episode), most similarities strewn throughout the daily operations and fight to stay alive (Martinez A.G. 2016). It is this fight to stay alive that makes startups so unique, and the most interesting part is you can't even see the fight on the employees faces. They embrace it and couldn't be less effected by it because its what they desire. That is how work in a tech startup gets done.

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