

21 SECRETS

OF CONTENT COMPANY FOUNDERS

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1 Successful Content Company Founders Cast A Narrow Net

Successful content company founders understand that having a specialty niche engenders trust.

Clients, buyers and consumers all feel safer buying from a company with a proven track record, a specialty that they're known for. You might feel that you're equally good at producing content for 16 year old boys as you are at delivering to middle aged women. You may believe you can create for several content niches and market sectors with equal skill and ability.

Wholefoods is one of the most trusted global brands. But you wouldn't go to there for a haircut.

National Geographic is a highly rated media brand, but you wouldn't trust Nat Geo for advice on fashion.

We buy from brands we trust. And we trust them because they're specialists.

If your company does not already have one area of specialty that it's known for, you need to fix that. And if your company does already have a specialty niche, you'll still find this section interesting, but you'll have a little less to do.

Being known as the "experts in" or "go to company for" a niche will help consumers, and it will help you one day find a buyer for your business.

Buyers want to acquire businesses that target segments they can't otherwise reach. Your segment cannot be too narrow. It is much easier to find a buyer for a company that creates content for a very specific audience need.

When it comes to having a clearly defined niche for your business, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?

2 Successful Content Company Founders Offer Client Insurance Policy

Successful founders understand the secret of selling a brilliant concept, format or idea is this: Someone who the buyer REALLY trusts.

Now, you may WANT to believe this is YOU. And nine times out of ten the buyer will not tell you straight that you are NOT.

Do not be blinded and deafened by your self-protecting determination, belief and resilience.

As much as the buyer likes you and crucially the idea you're selling them, they need an insurance policy, someone who can take responsibility if the project is a disaster.

You have to remember, buyers are vulnerable. Unlike you, they do not mostly own their business. They can be fired.

So, if a book they publish does not sell, if a show they commission tanks, if a movie they invest other people's money in flops. If no one buys the game they ordered - THEY ARE EXPOSED.

The only insurance policy they have is the NAME of the person or company they chose to deliver the project. When their boss says "What the hell happened with PROJECT X?"

They need to be able to say "Yes. I know. It was a disaster. But we did have NAME on the project."

No matter what your specialty niche, you know there are certain companies, certain individuals which, because they have such a good, long track record in this area, offer up this cast iron insurance policy for the buyer.

If this company is your company, if the person they can easily blame is you, great. However, if you and your company are too young or too inexperienced in this area you need to attach someone to your project or hire someone into your company who offers the insurance policy the buyer needs.

Every documentary producer who has successfully pitched a scripted project, knows they needed an established drama producer on the team. Every TV Presenters agency who has expanded to represent movie stars, understands they needed an agent with Hollywood experience in their company.

When it comes to making sure your company's projects always come with the right 'insurance policy' attached, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



3 Successful Content Company Founders Have Fewer Clients

Focusing 100% of your energy on one person's needs - and serving those needs every day until you make a sale, while you are delivering and after you've delivered - has a way better chance of bringing results for your business than trying to meet and talk infrequently with five, ten or twenty buyers who all end up feeling as though you don't care that much about them.

Of course it's scary putting all your eggs in one basket. It feels like a huge risk. Right? But, to extend the eggs metaphor - imagine a hen with 20 eggs. She simply cannot sit on all 20 eggs all of the time. If she makes five nests of four eggs each, she needs to move around from one nest to the next. There's still no way that all of the eggs will be kept at the right temperature for them to hatch. Instead of hatching all the eggs. Even if every egg is perfect and fertilised, without the right amount of hen-time NONE of them will hatch. It's the same with the potentiality of clients.

1. When did you last meet with your client?
2. How did you follow up on the last meeting?
3. What feedback or leads have they given you?
4. How have you followed up on their leads or feedback?
5. When did you last contact them about something they did that I was not involved in?
6. How frequently are you in touch with them?

Successful founders understand that buyers will go where the energy is. And the energy needs to come from you. Whether or not they consistently reply. They need to feel like they are your only client or your most important client.

When it comes to servicing the personal and professional needs of your clients, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?

4 Successful Content Company Founders Are Clear About Their Values

The most successful founders understand that we're much more drawn to people whose values resonate with our own, so they clearly message what (or who) they stand for.

You may feel, "My company's been around for years without being a stand for anything. We've lasted this long without having a value statement. Why do we need one now? Won't it look like we're coming to this too late? Wouldn't it have been better for us to have done this at launch?"

There is a Chinese Proverb: The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is now."

You or your saboteur may be saying: "Won't it seem very fake to be saying our company is a stand for these values now, when we never said it before."

But, here's the thing, your values will only seem inauthentic if they are inauthentic. I don't want you to embrace values that are not already very important to you. Perhaps your clients and colleagues don't already know that you care deeply about the environment, but your friends and family know. By saying, we give a percentage of our profits to environmental causes, you're just letting co-workers and buyers know what people who are close to you know already. In the process, you and your company will start to stand out from the crowd.

You may worry that by saying "Our company is all about nurturing young talent" that will scare away employees, advisers or clients who are not from young. In fact, it will help you attract a much higher calibre employees, advisers, clients and eventually even a buyer. Because it will attract employees, advisers and clients whose own values resonate with yours. They may not be young themselves, but they respect and admire the ambition to nurture evolving talent.

When it comes to clearly communicating your company's values, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?

5 Successful Content Company Founders Are Great At Asking For Help

The most confident, successful people company founders are good about enrolling others for support and advice. I'll take a gamble that they seek guidance from coaches, mentors and advisers?

How do I know this? Because hugely successful public figures from Oprah Winfrey to Bill Clinton, Leonardo DiCaprio and Hugh Jackman to Bill Gates all work extensively with a coach.

How do you feel about the idea of being advised? How do you hear "I feel you'd benefit from having someone to champion you?" What if I said "There's someone I know who could be very helpful to you?"

Do you sense a resistance within you? Do you feel it in your body?

Is part of you screaming out: "I've got this far without any help from anyone." "I've built this business alone." "I've made it work. Why change it."

All of these feelings are very common among entrepreneurs in the creative space.

Very often, content-driven companies are founded by people who did not enjoy their experience at school. They hated being "taught" "talked down to" "patronised."

Does that sound like you?

Many times creative founders started their own business because they did NOT enjoy working for someone else.

Is that you?

A lot of my clients tell me they launched their own business because they had been let down by other people. They could not count on others for help or support - So, they feel more comfortable, more in control if they do everything on their own.

Can you relate?

Here's the thing, chances are, up till now, you may well have done everything on your own. And you may have some very negative feelings about being helped. And, as you will know if this is your experience, other people tend NOT to offer support people like you. If you seem like you don't need help, if you act like you don't want help, you won't get help.

Ask yourself:

- Did I get where I got on my own?
- How good am I at enrolling other people?
- How much support and guidance from others do I have?
- Do I seek advice?
- If I offered am practical support, advice or connections, how would I react?

When it comes to ensuring you are properly supported, guided and advised, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



6

Successful Content Company Founders Pay Attention To The Buyers' Shopping List

Successful founders always have an eye on their ultimate client: The potential buyer of their business

10. Your Purpose

Does your company have values the buyer wants or needs to be associated with? Perhaps you're a diverse company and the buyer has not paid much attention to its employment practices? Maybe you're a stand for talented female or working class creatives. To be clear, having clear values will make you more attractive to clients and employees, so can add value further up the chain, but mostly buyers are not that bothered.

9. Your Advisors

Is this company well advised? Will the process be easy or hard? Do we know or trust any of the "board?"

Very often deals come about at a higher level - chairman to chairman or board member to board member. If you have minority shareholders who are spreading the word and managing relationships at a board-room level, it can be EXTREMELY helpful. This is why, if you don't have some big guns doing your bidding already, you may want to recruit some soon.

8. Your Niche

Does this company have a clear and distinct offering? Does this client appeal to a targeted audience? Is this a niche we (the potential buyer) want in on?

7. Your People

Is this company all about the founder or is there a succession plan? Who else comes with the sale, to run the business after the founder exits?

In a content driven business, the people, particularly the people who come up with ideas, are key to the value of a business. How tied in your rain-makers are can have a big effect on the desirability of your business.

6. Your Clients

Who are the clients who love working with this company? Are these clients we (the potential buyer) would like to sell more to?

Your clients are key. Any buyer will be very interested in who will be acquiring your company's content after the deal is done. If you have very special relationships with decision makers who love your output, this can make you extra desirable to a buyer, particularly if the acquiring company does not have strong relationships with your clients.

5. Your Mind-set

If you believe you're worth it, if you believe you will sell your business at a high multiple, the odds are increased.

I'm listing your mental mindset at number 5, but in reality how you lead, who you are, how you see the business, infuses everything you do and everyone who you attract. Ultimately, your mindset will determine the deal.

4. Your Company Culture

Is this company run like a mom and pop store, or like a global corporation?

When a big company acquires a small company, only very few smaller companies survive, especially once the founder takes the money and runs.

The companies that merge well tend to be companies with simple streamlined systems, companies that are run like big businesses. There are a number of reasons behind this. Mainly, it's because if a small company is run like a big company, when it's acquired, the employees hardly notice. But when a small company is run in a very eccentric way, it tends to attract team members who thrive on the chaos and don't stick around when systems are introduced by the new owner.

3. Your Ambition

Will the founder stay and push, or give up and go?

Yes. You are key to your company's past successes. You know that. Don't be modest. And your potential buyer knows it too. If you can appear to be hugely ambitious to drive your company to new highs, during and AFTER the earn-out, this is obviously way more attractive to a potential buyer than if it seems to them you're ready to take the money and run at the first opportunity.

2. Your Company's Future Potential

Are there tricks this business has missed, which we, the (smarter) new owners can exploit?

When it comes to the psychology of a sale, it doesn't pay to appear too smart.

There will be rights you have not exploited.

There will be territories you have not sold to.

There will be audiences and markets you have not penetrated.

And key hires you have not made.

Whatever the realities, let the potential buyer spot these glaring oversights, and have them think they're super smart. Let them dream of all the money they will make AFTER you've sold them your company with all of its untapped potential, just waiting for them to exploit.

1. Your Profit

Is this company's profit on an upward trajectory? Will we make back what we paid to buy it?

Your company's past, current and future profit is THE most important element potential buyers will be looking at.

Big companies quickly reach a size at which organic growth is no longer possible. The CEO of every Fortune 500 or FTSE 100 company gained their position with the promise of growth. The ONLY way they can deliver on that promise is to buy the growth.

They will tell you they love your output. They will tell you they love your team. They will say how much they admire your ethos. But make no mistake, what they want is your EBITDA. It's your operating profit or earnings before tax and deductions that is in the eyes of every M&A

teams eyes, the true and ONLY barometer of success.

When it comes to taking into account a potential buyer's shopping list, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



7

Successful Content Company Founders Hire Up

The most successful creative leaders understand that they are simply not as good at business as they are at being creative.

Hiring people who make your clients more comfortable is ALWAYS the very best thing you can do, even if, ESPECIALLY if, hiring people who are more liked and more experienced than you are makes YOU feel UNCOMFORTABLE. And if the buyer has specific ideas on WHO you should recruit - make sure you listen and take it on board. Hiring someone the client trusts puts more pressure on them, and takes pressure OFF you.

Remember, you are the founder, you are the boss. Whatever glory this older, wiser, more experienced team mate brings, you and your company have the most to gain.

Just as you would not, I'm guessing, hire a designer, author, actor or director who had little or no track record in their particular field, you should not assume that you have the necessary skills or experience to be a good manager.

Hiring up also pertains to other areas much closer to the creative heart of your business. Perhaps you're an agent who decided to form your own company, or a TV producer who took the leap to launch an Indie. You could be a music-producer who's started your own label, an Editor who formed your own in-print, or a games designer who's opened a Studio. This means you have qualities which other producers, agents, editors or designers do not have. It means you are possibly more entrepreneurial, more driven, more ambitious. However, it does not mean that you are a better producer, editor agent or designer.

My experience of being a founder and working with many founders as a mentor, coach and business adviser over the years has shown me this: Founders tend to have a rare kind of determination, resilience and self-belief. This determination and self-belief is necessary for you to quit your job and strike out on your own.

It was necessary for you to launch your business and will continue to be invaluable as you build, grow and sell. It is often a resilience, determination and self-belief that SHUTS OUT any voices, ideas or opinions that you do not want to hear, it sometimes shuts out advice that you are AFRAID may be true.

When it comes to hiring people who are better known or more experienced, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



8

Successful Content Company Founders Prioritise Projects Over The Business

It's normal for founders of content companies to focus on the needs of whatever paid projects are keeping our business afloat. But however many paid projects they are delivering, successful founders understand the secret of always add one more: the company itself.

If you want to grow and one day sell your business you will need to bring the same attitude and focus you apply to every paid project into transforming your company into a big-ticket show.

As the founder of a creative business, you know that at every stage of your company's evolution, there will be passionate creatives, who will be committed to the successful delivery of individual projects. They will do this because as creatives, they are attached. Their egos make them believe that if the project is a success, they are a success. So they will take care of projects - very often at the company's expense. They are stakeholders in the project, but they don't care about your brand or your bottom line. You know what I mean, the "auteur director" or "the celebrity designer" who takes the project way over budget and runs your team ragged in pursuit of their vision.



Running an ideas-driven business, you will be very familiar with talented people who are very good at putting their needs first. It's so "all about them" that often, they'll "forget" you and your company were even involved.

That's why one person needs to consistently focus on the well-being of the people who work for you, someone needs to take ultimate responsibility with each buyer for every piece of work you deliver, someone needs to renew the vision of what your company stands for and be accountable for staying on track. Someone needs to continuously remind the wider community of what your business is up to. These are your "date nights" "down time" and "romantic breaks."

And crucially, in every battle between Business and Show, someone needs to make sure that it's your business that wins. In other words, you need to make sure your people are happy and the company is profitable.

When it comes to prioritizing the needs of your company over the needs of paid projects, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



9 Successful Content Company Founders Stay In Touch With What They Love

Successful founders, or rather, founders who have made the transition successfully from creative to business-leader, understand that the secret of loving what you do is loving what you do.

Sure, this often means admitting what you do less well, and delegating business chores to others. If you launched your business because you love writing and producing, make sure you continue to write and produce. If your company is built on the back of your love of designing, don't ever stop designing. Even if you're not the best agent on your team, if your agency came about because you love representing talent, no matter how many other demands there are on you, find ways to delegate enough so that you're still doing what you love.

When it comes to staying in touch with what you love to do at work, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



10 Successful Content Company Founders Run Their Business Like A Small Business

Founders of content companies who have successfully sold, understand the secret of running their small or medium sized company AS IF it were a global company.

The biggest problem that small companies have is how to grow into medium sized companies. And the biggest problem medium companies have? Right. How to grow into a big company.

Want to guess what the biggest question huge companies have when acquiring small, medium or large companies? “How will it fit in with us? How will we interface? How painful is it likely to be?”

As you would hope, I have a solution that you may want to consider.

Run your small or medium sized company AS IF it were a global company.

So what does that look like in practise? It looks like this:

Put systems in place for everything. Now.

Make sure that there are procedures in place for how your company does EVERYTHING.

Get every head of department, or whoever is the best person in that area, to write out clear, easy to follow systems and procedures for everything their department does.

Get your front of house person to write out: How to greet guests on arrival, how to answer the phone, how to let team mates know a package has arrived. Get them to create templates for every kind of sign.

Get your head of accounts to create templates for every kind of invoice, payslip and reminder.

Ask your business affairs person for templates for all the collaboration agreements and other documents you regularly use

Make sure your HR person details your company's policies around hiring, diversity and inclusion, training etc.

Ask your Head of Production to produce clear instructions around everything from health and safety procedures to environmental protection.

Their instructions should be clear: Imagine we had to open 30 new offices around the world tomorrow - we wouldn't have time or man-power to train everyone in our systems and procedures, so your instructions need to be crystal clear and simple to follow.

Once you compile these easy-to follow instructions from every head of department, you will have a complete operating manual for your business.

Now, you may not be opening new offices in 30 cities tomorrow. But a few months from now, you may need to open a satellite office in Mumbai or Minnesota. And if you do, it will be SO easy.



11 Successful Content Company Founders Hire Gen Z

Successful founders, and the only ones with a future understand that Gen Z are the future, the demographic everyone wants. By the end of next year, Generation Z will be the largest group of consumers globally.

Media companies require high levels of cooperation, involving an ability to submerge your own concerns for the good of the team. This is incompatible with Gen Z.

Yet unless you only want to hire entry-level people over 30 and produce content Gen Z will never consume, this challenging generation is an important part of your company's future. Forget trying to change or manage them. If you don't want to fade away into irrelevance, you need to understand them.

When it comes to hiring Gen-Z, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



12 Successful Content Company Founders Don't Think They're Too Old

A study, conducted by professors from MIT and North-western, together with the principal economist from the Census Bureau, found that even in consumer-facing high tech industries, the average age of founders falls in the early forties. In other industries such as oil and gas or biotechnology, the average age is closer to 47.

When you look at the most successful start-ups, the average age of the founder (at launch) goes up, not down. Empirical evidence shows that successful entrepreneurs tend to be middle-aged, not young. The study's findings point to entrepreneurial performance rising sharply with age before peaking in the late fifties.

Greater access to financial resources and deeper social networks may contribute. Work experience certainly plays a critical role. "Relative to founders with no relevant experience, those with at least three years of prior work experience in the same narrow industry as their start-up were 85% more likely to launch a highly successful start-up."

I have found that when it comes to how we see ourselves, and others, we nearly always assume the perspective of 20 years ago. So, at 45 we judge ourselves as our 25-year-old self would have done. We tell ourselves we're tired and past it. At 65 years we see ourselves as ready to retire because that's the perspective we had about being 65 when we were 45.



This problem is made worse by the fact that so many of our ideas were shaped when we were in our teens and early twenties, when our grandparents were in their 50s or 60s and anyone past the age of 40 seemed ancient.

That's why it can be so helpful to check in with your future self and have a chat with yourself from the perspective of 20 years in the future. If you are 45, your 65-year-old self will doubtless urge you not to squander the energy and vitality you currently have. If you're 65, your 85-year-old self will be even more encouraging. And if you're only 25 and think you're too old to launch a new business, your 45-year-old self will hopefully give you the kind of slap which this reality check from Harvard suggests you deserve.

When it comes to seeing yourself as vital, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



13 Successful Content Company Founders Take Real Vacations

Yes, it may sound obvious, but founders who not only look successful but feel successful, report taking at least two 10 day or longer vacations per year.

1. Set your intentions for your time away from work

This is as important if you're spending the weekend alone as it is if you're vacationing in a group. Be very clear about what it is you want from your time, both in terms of what you want to do and how you want it to feel. In other words, be honest with yourself and others. Perhaps you want to go sailing, experiment with a new diet, read a novel or practice yoga? There's still time. Declare it. And how would you like to feel when your weekend is over? More connected with your family, more in-tune with your partner, more relaxed in yourself, re-energized in your body? Great. Let them know.

If your partner wants an active weekend when you're hoping for a restful one, both your needs can be met if you're clear about them upfront. Even when you do make yourself abundantly clear, your needs can easily get derailed by other peoples' demands. But, when you keep your wishes secret, there is little chance of them ever being fulfilled.

2. Don't take your office with you

It sounds so obvious. In pre-digital days, no one would dream of packing the word processor, fax machine, filing cabinets, and office phone with them on a trip to St Barths. But these days, we all do it, because all of these functions and many more besides, are packed into our phones. How can you possibly disconnect and unwind with all of that work noise happening on your handset?

I get that you need to be contactable, in case your mom breaks a hip or your CEO has a heart attack, so I advise clients to buy the cheapest phone you can, put your SIM card in it and let anyone who needs to know that in an emergency they can dial your number. At the very least, this weekend forward calls to landline and switch your phone to airplane mode.

3. Leave all social media behind

Managing Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat when you're on vacation plays on all your insecurities and neuroses, leaving you feeling frayed. Turn your focus on your surroundings and yourself, or the people you've chosen to be with. If you feel compelled to take pictures, by all means, pack a digital camera and snap away. You can post them later. Posing for and posting images will distract you, and stop you savouring the long weekend.

Finally, there is no surer way to darken the mood of your downtime than by consuming movies and novels which are depressing. Instead, choose music, films, and books that are joyous and enriching. There is even music you can listen to without wifi or internet connection.

When it comes to getting away from it all for 10 days or more, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



14 Successful Content Company Founders Exploit The Power Of Nothingness

Elon Musk and Bill Gates are not the first original thinkers to understand that doing nothing is essential if you want to think more creatively. Musk, I am told, takes long solitary showers. Gates, it is reported, spends up to a month at a time alone in a cabin.

Huge breakthroughs in science, technology, and the arts, it seems, have come to people who were in the bath (Archimedes) or on a walk (Tesla.) Even Leonardo da Vinci, who took more than ten years to complete the Mona Lisa, clearly benefited greatly from what some of us might dismiss as procrastination.

It makes sense. When you recall the last time you had a flash of insight, was your brow furrowed in concentration or were you, in fact, busy with something else?

Louis Pasteur, the father of germ theory, wasn't wrong when he said that 'chance favors the prepared mind,' yet we all suffer under the delusion that diligent research and prolonged concentration will generate new and original ideas. It seldom does. New thoughts emerge when we don't focus on them. It takes periods of uninterrupted, freely associated thought for personal growth, insight, and creativity to emerge

It has been proven that our brain's capacity for generation increases exponentially when our pre-frontal cortex is relaxed. The latest cranial imaging backs this up, supporting the validity of "Eureka" moments, associated with bursts of high-frequency activity in the brain's right temporal lobe. These bursts are preceded by a "brain blink" which signifies that the individual has been less aware of the environment around them. Crucially, these patterns are not seen during analytic thinking.

For me, mindless meandering is induced when I'm driving or doing chores. For some people, it's when they're running. For others, it's when they're working in the garden. Being outdoors in nature seems to help all of our conscious brains switch off, allowing the necessary space for original thought.

So why has this kind of mindless activity which is so important for creative thinking become terrifying to us? In a 2014 study by the University of Virginia, participants were given a choice between doing nothing and electric shock. Despite having stated that they would pay money to avoid being shocked with electricity when faced with sitting in silence 67% of men and 25% of women chose to inflict electric shock on themselves. Be clear about your goal, commit it to paper, focus on it, and then put it away and forget about it.

You can never be sure when your creative brain will come up with a breakthrough idea or novel solution. But if you want more Eureka moments in your life, you'll need to start by clearing your diary to take time out. Garden, hike, tidy. Do whatever helps you to meander mindlessly. And if you want more original thought from your teams, don't bring them in for "a brainstorm." Lead them out on a wordless walk in the park.

When it comes to allowing space and time in nothingness to allow new ideas to come into being, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



15 Successful Content Company Founders Set Clear Goals

Successful founders know whether they've had a successful year, because they set themselves clear goals for the year ahead.

If you are measuring yourself against what your peers have managed to achieve. It's so easy for us to think we're not successful because others in the industry have achieved more.

For me, success simply means living up to an intention, honouring a commitment or achieving a personal goal. It's also about balance. That's right, even for TV and film professionals, there is more to life than work.

If you're wondering which area of your life has been a little out of balance in the last 12 months, take three minutes to fill out your personalised Wheel of Life.

Now is a great time to start focusing on what you want for the year ahead and directing all of your energy towards whatever it is you want to attract and achieve. I encourage all my clients to make five separate lists for the year ahead. And, of course, I do it too. I've been seeing amazing results.

Each list covers a different area of life:

- Career and Finances
- Health and Personal Growth
- Family and Friends
- Romance and Home
- Travel, Adventure and Fun

Pick one area at a time – let's start with Career and Finances. Imagine what it will feel like, a year from now, when you're looking back at the success you've had in this area. What milestones, achievements and events would make you feel, a year from now, that you'd enjoyed real, staggering success in the area of Career and Finances? Now write down a list of specific measurable targets, complete with numbers and dates.

Next, take on a new area. Let's say it's Travel, Adventure and Fun. What would great fun in 2020 look like to you? Twelve months from now, having had a fun-filled year, what adventures will you have had? What trips will you have taken? Go ahead and list them out.

If your list feels easy, you haven't been ambitious enough. At the other extreme, if you're thinking 'Help! I'm NEVER going to achieve any of that,' then the list you've made isn't right for you either. Everything you write down has to come from a place of pleasure and pride for you.

Each of your five lists needs to be specific, measurable and a real stretch. And don't hedge your bets by being vague.

When you're done, read all five of your lists aloud to a good friend and to your partner if you have one. Don't skip this part, it's important.

Now, file away the lists under '2020 Wish Lists' or if you've written them by hand, put them away in a drawer, where you can find them later. In one year from now, you can look at your lists again and see how much of what you listed has been achieved.

There are two important aspects to this exercise. If you don't dream it and declare it as what you want, it has very little chance of happening. If you don't achieve everything you dreamed up, that's not failure. In fact, unless what we're striving for is so easily within our grasp, reaching for it wouldn't qualify as striving. Besides, we inevitably need to fail multiple times in order to succeed.



I have failed many times. I have launched businesses that floundered; I have produced TV series that flopped. I have failed, in small things, several times just this past week. According to Harvard and some of the world's most successful founders, my failures – and yours – do not make us less able, less qualified or less alluring.

Dubbed the Queen of All Media, Oprah Winfrey was the richest African American of the 20th century. She believes: “There is no such thing as failure. Failure is just life trying to move us in another direction.”

How would it feel to proudly own all your failed attempts in 2020. Sharing with others what you've learned and how you've grown could even make you a more human, stronger and effective leader.

I've found from experience that while not everything I wish for happens, it certainly is true that if I don't set my intention on something it's very unlikely to happen.

At the end of the year, if you've achieved just some of what's on your amazing lists – and I guarantee that you will – then you'll have had what you dreamed of as a successful year. And what could be better than that?

When it comes to setting out in lists what success would look like to you in the future, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



16 Successful Content Company Founders Are Committed Not Attached

I want you to think of a situation at work where you found your sense of playfulness and ease being challenged -perhaps you were stressed by an exchange or exhausted by trying to perfect a task. In any case, it got you wound up. You felt stressed, tight in your chest possibly.

Have you got a situation in mind.

I'm willing to bet that you were making whatever the situation was about - all about you.

There may be some part of you that believes that delivering a positive outcome will mean you are not a loser. In other words, you are attached.

If you've ever had the mindset of 'I am this project/relationship. If it succeeds then I succeed, if it fails, I have failed, You are attached. But you don't have to make the outcome all about you. There is another way.

If you can say: 'This project is my responsibility and I commit fully to a positive outcome, but whether it succeeds or fails will not impact who I am or how I see myself,' this is being committed without being attached.

This will help you with success and with failure.

Has part of you been thinking: Even if I don't beat myself up about failing or falling in the future. How about my clients? They won't work with me again if I fail to deliver to their expectations.

Has part of you been worrying about how hard it is for your company to make mistakes or failures?

Here's the thing: If you make your own failures personal, or if you make the failures of your team or your company personal, it has a ripple effect that will pull you down.

Now, it is very hard not to make failure all about you, especially if you're accustomed to making every success about you - and I respect that.

There is, however, another way.

As the founder and boss, you are ultimately responsible for every project that comes out of your company. And you should always take full responsibility, whether or not you were intimately responsible for it, or not. If it fails or if it succeeds, you are responsible. But that's very different from making it about you.

You can be 100% responsible but not at all to blame.

Let me give you an example:

I will never forget the call I got from the controller of a UK channel to say how disappointed he was by a TV series we had delivered to his channel. It was not at all what he'd expected, he said, when he'd green lit the show.

Now, if I'd been attached, I would have made it all about me. So how would I have reacted? I'd have been defensive. Right? I would have felt he was blaming me.

Think of the last time that happened to you. Your company produced something that a client was not happy with. Did you make it about you? Did you feel the client was blaming you?

Without the important distinction that being responsible does not make me to blame, I would have tried to shift the blame.

In this particular case, the series had been ordered by one of the channel's many commissioning editors. The program spec had changed once we went into production. As the controller had rightly complained, the programme was no longer the same show that he had originally green lit. However, this was down to specific instructions we had along the way from the channel's commissioning editor.

If I had been attached, if I had taken the blame personally, I would have made sure the blame got laid, where it belonged, with his commissioning editor. But where would that have left me with her? In reality the commissioner, not the channel controller, was my client. If I'd blamed her, I have no doubt she in turn would have turned the tables on me, and made sure I, not her, got the blame. What's more, she would never have worked with my company again.

Because I was not attached, I was able to take a very different route: I apologised. I told the channel controller that he was right. Yes, the show had evolved since he first read the treatment. I took responsibility for the changes. I apologised again for not having kept him abreast of all the developments. I assured him that my team had remained in close communication with his excellent commissioning team throughout the process.

I asked him if perhaps the next time we worked together, he would like me to be in closer contact with him? He said 'that might be a good idea' - I could tell his anger and disappointment were becoming defused.

Finally, I asked him if, given what he'd seen of the show, there were any changes he felt we could still usefully make in the edit. Even calmer now, he said he'd come back to me. As it happens, he didn't. But we did go on to make more shows for his channel - and when the commissioning editor moved on to another broadcaster, as buyers have a way of moving on, she ordered several big series from us there.

When it comes to being committed but NOT attached, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



17 Successful Content Company Founders Great At Giving Or Receiving Feedback

1. We Hear Feedback As Criticism - Which We Are Hard-Wired To Reject

Feedback is a word deliberately chosen for its neutrality. It's intended to be neither positive nor negative; neither criticism nor praise. Just feedback.

Sure, how leaders communicate feedback can have a huge impact on our well-being and performance. It has been shown to help, for instance, when feedback is delivered in a warm and gentle tone of voice. Cosmetic queen Mary Kay famously advised to always “sandwich every bit of criticism between two heavy layers of praise” - a now widely adopted practice which I feel is responsible for why many of us have become completely deaf to praise (which we hear merely as ‘filling’) as well as to criticism.

Yet, no matter how it is delivered, feedback has come to be understood as “criticism.” Yes, it may be sandwiched between two heavy layers of sweet appreciation, but it is the bitter filling of criticism that we are programmed to remember.

Because our brains are designed to protect us from being wrong (especially when we are wrong) we respond to criticism as if our very survival was being threatened.

“Threats to our standing in the eyes of others are remarkably potent biologically,” says psychologist Daniel Goleman, “almost as powerful as threats to our very survival.”

2. We Turn Feedback About Our Actions Into Attacks On Who We Are:

Human beings are meaning-making machines - and the meanings we make up as adults are shaped by the negative meanings we made up when we were children.

I still remember that dark day in October when seated at the kitchen table, aged 6, my father handed me back the letter I had written to my cousins, with his corrections on it. There were spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and places where he found my writing illegible. After I got done re-writing the whole letter, my dad handed it back for me to re-write again, and again. And again. Until he deemed it good enough to send.

I'm sharing this personal story with you because as a human being I'm guessing my reaction to feedback may not be that different yours.

Aged six, I made it mean that I wasn't good enough.

Perhaps you too remember the moment (aged 5 or 6) when your mother or father said something to you, which you interpreted as "I am stupid", "I am ugly" or "I am unlovable."

My belief that I was not good enough meant that for decades I took most feedback to be criticism and all criticism to confirm what I already secretly knew: that I was not good enough.

3. When we don't feel empathy, we reject even useful feedback:

Even though I understood on some level that my father had only my best interests at heart and wanted to help me improve my writing skills, I didn't feel I was being fairly treated - and it's almost impossible to take feedback from someone who you feel is treating you unfairly, even if the feedback makes perfect sense. This, according to Douglas Stone, a Lecturer on Law at Harvard Law School, is one of the main reasons we reject even the most constructive feedback.

4. Although We Can Only Improve By Being Corrected, We Resist Feedback:

Writing in the Harvard Business Review Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone offer this perspective: "The [feedback] process strikes at the tension between two core human needs — the need to learn and grow, and the need to be accepted just the way you are."

Up until that moment in my childhood, every potato print I produced,

every drawing I sketched, every poem or story I wrote was perfect. I was perfect. Or, because my first five years had been a shower of praise and gold stars, like the contestants on a talent show before Simon Cowell delivers his verdict, I too thought I was perfect.

Suddenly, in this, my first ever experience of “feedback” my perfect world was shattered. So I resisted the feedback and made my dad wrong.

5. We Don't Remember What's Actually Been Said

Charles Jacobs, author of *Management Rewired: Why Feedback Doesn't Work*, writes that when we are given feedback that conflicts with our self-image, our instinct is to change the information rather than ourselves.

6. We Gravitate Towards People Who Approve Of Us

Francesca Gino of Harvard Business School discovered that “people tend to move away from those who provide feedback that is more negative than their view of themselves. They do not listen to their advice and prefer to stop interacting with them altogether. It seems that people tend to strengthen their with people who only see their positive qualities.”

Having catalogued what I see as being the six biggest obstacles to being able to receive feedback here are a few tips on how to transform feedback into the precious gift it really is.

Practice Active Listening: Maintain good eye contact and keep your body language open—don't cross your arms or legs. Ask questions which clarify what's been said and afterward, summarize what you think you heard.

Just say “Thank You.” Even if you're certain you're right and the feedback is wrong, being defensive could shut down future criticism or, worse, get you labelled as “uncoachable” by your colleagues. The only response to constructive criticism is to say “Thank you.”

Let It Sink In. Spend a day or two evaluating the feedback you've been given. Does the criticism seem true? Does it describe limitations which other people may have pointed out before?

Don't Wait For Feedback - Actively Ask For It. Rather than waiting for feedback, I solicit it from my clients with three very simple questions:

What are you getting from me that you want more of?

What are you getting from me that you want less of?

What are you not getting from me that you want?

Then, I steel myself for the reply, in the knowledge that their honesty and my ability to hear it will make the experience of working together way more enriching for both of us.

When it comes to setting out in lists what success would look like to you in the future, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



18 Successful Content Company Founders Don't Try To Do Everything

Let's be clear. When you started your company, like me, you probably did everything on your own - because you had to, because no one else was there to support you, because you could. You could answer emails, get the phone, make coffee, write proposals, look over contracts, take meetings, interview staff, meet the bank manager, design the website, send out a press release. Sure, it was a bit exhausting, but also fun - and you got to be in charge of everything which is one reason a lot of us started a company in the first place.

But these days, there is ONE job only you can do - and that's being you. There is only one founder, there is only one ultimate boss. When it comes to "being you" no one else can stand in. Clients, stakeholders and the press only want to meet the founder, key employees need to meet the ultimate boss. You cannot delegate the kind of leadership that only you can bring.

Since you're the founder of a creative business, I suspect there is also a big element of creative leadership and decision-making, that only you can bring. This is what President Truman meant by "It's extraordinary what you can accomplish." If it's not so extraordinary that only you can accomplish it, I'm willing to bet you shouldn't be doing it.

Which means, in order to create space for you to be you, for you to play the founder, you have to delegate all the rest. The legals, the accounting, the drafting, the designing, the press-releases and all those other endless meetings, everything else can and should be done by other people.

When it comes to ensuring you give yourself time and space to be the founder (as distinct from all the other roles in your company) how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?

19 Successful Content Company Founders Don't Think They Can Do It On Their Own

Many times creative founders started their own business because they did NOT enjoy working for someone else. Is that you?

A lot of my clients tell me they launched their own business because they had been let down by other people. They could not count on others for help or support - So, they feel more comfortable, more in control if they do everything on their own. Can you relate?

Here's the thing, chances are, up till now, you may well have done everything on your own. And you may have some very negative feelings about being helped.

So here's a thought: You probably DON'T NEED any help. Your business can probably chug a long, just as it has been.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Did I get where I got on my own?
- How good am I at enrolling other people?
- How much support and guidance from others do I have?
- Do I seek advice?
- If I offered am practical support, advice or connections, how would I react?

When it comes to giving and receiving feedback, how do you rate your own performance for each, on a scale of 1 to 10?



20 Successful Content Company Founders Don't Allow Past Failure To Dictate The Future

Successful founders don't allow their fear of failure to hold them back.

Raised in a world that puts such a high value on success, it's only to be expected that we would grow up fearing failure. But here's the thing: Stuck in a fear of failure you will never drive your business to great success.

Let me ask you: Does it seem to you as though failure is the opposite of success? I promise you, it is NOT. Trying and failing multiple times is necessary to your business's success.

I would encourage you to think of all your failures, breakdowns, aborted attempts in the past, as the necessary stepping stones to your future success.

When we're succeeding in meeting our own goals and everything's going 'right', it can be very hard to explain quite how it happened. Success is very hard to learn from or repeat. Failure on the other hand, well, we can usually identify the various factors that made something go wrong.

Failure means I made a commitment which I did not keep, or listed a goal that I did not achieve.

The only sure-fire way I know to completely avoid failure is to never make commitments, never set intentions and never state your goals. A life without failure is a life without striving.

Of course, no one knowingly aims for failure. We hope for success. But, unless what we're striving for is so easily within our grasp that reaching for it wouldn't qualify as striving, we inevitably need to fail multiple times in order to succeed. This is true of every area of endeavour, from learning a new skill to launching a new company; from committing to being a good friend to becoming an inspiring leader.

The thing is, when you don't fail, you don't allow yourself to become stronger in that process, resulting in the kind of resilience that is universally understood to be core to being a successful leader.

When you protect yourself from failing, you stop taking risks. Yet risk taking and experimentation are vital to your success.

When it comes to embracing your failures, learning from them and moving on, how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?



21 Successful Content Company Founders Don't Pretend To Be Perfect

Successful founders don't pretend to be perfect. Instead of trying to be the best, they strive to simply do their own personal best.

We all know that perfection is unattainable. So, why do we often strive to be the perfect mother, father, child, colleague, athlete, friend or boss? This is one of the topics of LGBT Talents, the first event in France bringing together students, professionals, activists, lawyers and association leaders to discuss the issues LGBT+ face at work. The quest for perfection, of course, is not exclusive to the LGBT community. 'I'll be perfect' or 'I'll be the best at what I do' is a suit of armor, designed to protect our fragile egos from the horror of an unspoken fear that 'I'm not good enough.'

Inside many founders is a shocked 5-year-old girl whose mom or dad just scolded her with the words 'you stupid little girl.' Within many top entrepreneurs is a stunned 6-year-old boy, whose teacher or relative caused him to fear he was ugly or fat. When as a small child we are faced with the terrifying possibility that we have just been declared 'substandard' by an adult, who can blame us for making a secret pact with ourselves to be better than everyone else.

It is our failures, our flaws, and disappointments that make us relatable to others. When we're acting as though we're perfect or better than others, this defense we have built to protect ourselves from rejection often causes other people to keep their distance. We may be admired for our perfect record or excellent results, but it's our mistakes and our regrets that will draw people close and turn strangers into friends.

When it comes to showing your vulnerability ,how do you rate your own performance on a scale of 1 to 10?

Remy Blumenfeld