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Omid & Pete – Two Googlers & best mates sharing their perspectives at the intersection of life, t...
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10 things I wish I knew on my first day at Google

This upcoming November I will reach my 5th “Googleversary”. And boy, what a crazy ride this has been. I’m looking back on a journey that started in Dublin, had a quick stop in New York, and then ended in our headquarters in California. Well, “ended” is certainly the wrong word considering that I’ve spent a significant amount of my past three years traveling throughout Latin America, building a successful partner ecosystem for our cloud computing business.

Besides racking up an unfathomable quantity of flight miles, there were many work experiences and human interactions I made along the way that shaped my behavior and thinking. Google is really an interesting place. You are surrounded by these intimidatingly smart people coming from the best colleges and employers. You have top notch managers ranging from “best in class” MBAs to former marines who fought in the battle of Fallujah. And what a work culture—always promoting autonomy and the habit of thinking big.

I sometimes look back on the “Omid” I was 5 years ago and often wish I knew the things I know today. Throughout this time I learned some highly valuable lessons—some through fatal failures and others through hard-earned successes. Lessons that bear validity beyond Google and which I hope to share with a wider audience.

1) Outperform your Core

Google is a place full of distraction. Once you walk through the magic door called “you are hired”, you see a gazillion opportunities in front of you. So many people you want to meet, so many projects you want to contribute to, so many ideas that shoot through your head. There is TONS of stuff you *could* be doing. It just doesn’t mean that you *should* be doing them—at least not right away. Let me explain.

In general, folks will give you a lot of credit if you do not define yourself by your job description, but if you go above and beyond to help out wherever you can. But there is this one super important thing that I tell anyone who starts at Google: **outperform your core.** You were hired for a specific purpose, be it to manage a market, build partner relationships, develop a feature or hit a sales number. Make sure you build credibility by nailing what you were hired for. Only then people will appreciate and value all the things you do on the side. If you fall behind in your core area while you are trying to pursue those many other things, you won’t have the track record you need to eventually step out of your core.



2) Everyone is just one coffee away from you. Ask for it.

One of my mentors once told me something that stuck with me ever since: “everyone in this company is just one coffee away from you”. What sounded like a nice thing to say, ended up being a fundamental principle of my networking philosophy throughout Google. Whatever company you work for, you will come across so many people who either work on interesting projects or seem to have an interesting background—doesn’t matter if it’s peers, managers or executives. The simplest thing you can do is to shoot them a quick email and express your interest in picking their brains over a cup of coffee or learn more about the work they do (...and believe me, everyone loves to talk about themselves). Worst thing is they will say no. Best thing is that you will end up getting 30 mins face time with someone who could be your future mentor, manager, inspiration, friend, #filltheblank.

3) Meeting vs. Exceeding

The “gold currency” at Google is not to meet people’s’ expectations, but to exceed them. If I think of the promotions I got or the many promotions of my friends and colleagues, they all came down to the same denominator: folks were showing their readiness for the next level by constantly exceeding expectations. I’ve come to believe that this is the key to growing one’s career, namely to leave a lasting impression on the people around and above you by not just giving them what they ask for, but by doing it better than they could ever have imagined. Whatever task, whatever target, whatever deliverable and project, always go for the 110%+. You wanna be the one that will become the go-to person for your management. You wanna be the one that delivers on time and beyond what is asked for. You wanna be the one whose opinion is desired, valued and respected. You wanna be the one that gets the promotion because he is not due for it, but because he damn deserves it. This is what you should be aiming for. In order to get that, you need to earn the respect of your peers and managers. How? Exceed their expectations. Once you do that, the rest will follow.

4) Never ride the wave of your reputation

One of the biggest mistakes I made at Google was to ride the wave of my reputation—resting on the laurels of my previous achievements. In 2012, two of my closest supporters—my manager and my director—both changed their roles within just 2 months. This turned out to be

a big surprise. Shortly after, I had a new manager and a new director. I knew that both of them were aware of my trajectory and my reputation as a “high performer” in the organization. With that in mind, I probably relied too much on this reputation as opposed to thinking myself I would have to prove myself anew. I didn’t necessarily do it intentionally, but a few months later I noticed how my standing in the organization wasn’t as good as it used to be. Once I became aware of it, it was already too late. Just because someone hears you are a high performer, doesn’t mean the person will perceive you as such. Never rely on your reputation, but make it your goal to prove yourself with every single person you come across.



5) Surround yourself by excellence

Surround yourself by Excellence. It’s a quote that Omid Kordestani, the 11th employee of Google, once told my mentor Omid Ashtari who then passed it down to me (from Omid to Omid to Omid basically). It sounds so simple, but there is so much to it. It means that you should bond with and befriend those people who are stellar, from whom you can learn and who can be a guiding light in your career. Invest in relationships and be aware of who the “really good people” are (even

among the best, you always have the top 10%). Who are the ones that are on the fast-track of their careers. Find them, befriend them, learn from them and use them as your career accelerator. Work with them, let them mentor you and be open to learn from their opinions, successes and mistakes. Most importantly though, ask for it. As I said, everyone is just one coffee away.



6) Build bridges that will take you places one day

Point 3 and 5 already touch on the aspect of networking, but this is way too important to not be listed properly. One thing I tell myself is that anyone I will meet throughout my career (at Google, in Silicon Valley or along my many trips) will most likely end up working at a cool company, on interesting projects, have a crazy strong network and most certainly be successful. And as my life has taught me, it's the connections you make that will help you one day get to where you need to be (functioning as a bridge that you can cross one day). If I hadn't kept a close networking relationship with my former colleague Carlos (back in Dublin), he would have never asked me to move to the US and to join the Latin American team that he had founded. I truly

believe that people cross paths more than just once, so make sure you build as many meaningful “bridges” as possible. Anyone you meet can one day be the person who will help you get the dream job you are looking for. You don’t know it yet, but be aware of the importance every single person might play in your life one day.

7) Careers are not a sprint but a marathon.

There was a time in early 2013 when I was super frustrated with my job. I was tired of what I was doing and I felt my learning curve was flattening day after day. My career had started very much on “the fast track”, but 3 years in, I felt I was being surpassed by so many people. It bothered me since I had a hard time motivating myself to step up and to fight myself out of the situation. It wasn’t until I was chatting with my former colleague and friend Alberto who encouraged me to think of my career as a marathon and not as a sprint. What does that mean? Well, just as a marathon goes 42km, a career also goes ± 45 years—quite similar. And as someone who has finished 4 marathons, I know that you can’t sprint through the 42km at full speed. There will be sections you will be running faster than other sections. Some parts will be uphill, others will be downhill. Sometimes you need to stop to refuel and reorient yourself. A career is not much different. You can’t expect to race through it at every single point in time. There will be times when your learning curve will be flat, other times when it will be steep—just like a 42km race. This analogy helped me a lot to cope with how things were going and to not put myself under unnecessary pressure but to focus on effectuating the change I needed.

8) Be a nice guy.

Wanna hear something crazy? Be a nice guy. That’s what my manager told me on the first day I started at Google. I had learned that he was a Stanford MBA, so I was curious to hear what he learned during those two years that I could apply to my career at Google. That was his response, “*be a nice guy*”. At first it didn’t make sense, but then it dawned on me. People want to work with nice guys. Eventually, people will want to work *for* nice guys. How to be a nice guy? It’s not that hard. When you see someone new on the floor, be the one who approaches the person to introduce yourself and welcome him/her. When someone is in need, be the first who offers his help. When someone is successful, be the first who applauds the person. When the weekend is over, don’t be the one who complains that Mondays suck, but be the one who comes in and says that it’s going to be a fucking

awesome week (sorry to break it do you, but 1/7 of your life consists of Mondays .. you better work on your Monday attitude).



9) We first start aspiring to work for companies. We end up aspiring to work for people

I wasn't attracted to Google because of the people, but because of the name. 5 years in, the major reason why I haven't left yet is not because of the name, but because of the people. You see the change? It's funny how at the beginning of our careers we always strive to have those brands on our resumes. Even as a start-up we want to be funded by the top names. But if I think about today, there are a handful of people at Google that I would follow blindly to any company if they offer me to join them on their new adventure. These are the "nice guy"-type people that I want to work for and whom I would follow independent of where they go. At some point it won't matter to you that much anymore where you work, but who you work with. We start following brands and names, we end up following people and leaders.

10) As much as promotions matter inside, they actually don't really matter outside.

Promotions. You have them at any company. And no matter how start-up-flat Google remained throughout the years, you have them here, too. And just like anywhere, anyone wants to be promoted—quick, ideally below what the average is. I played that game as well. During my first 18 months at Google I was far too focused on getting my first promotion. That made me work crazy hours and just do anything that would give me the feeling that I'd still be “on track”. Some promotions later, I look back and realize that while they were needed and helpful for me to advance, they don't really matter outside of this place. Once I leave Google, no one will care about whether I'm an “Associate Market Analyst,” a “Level 5” or “whatever the hierarchy at your company is called.” The day I leave Google, all that matters is what I did here. What will matter is my work experience, the impact I had and the skills I learned—not an internal political game that I might or might not have played well.

These are the 10 major lessons I learned throughout my past years. Some of them I learned in my first weeks, others I learned just recently. And if I think of what else is out there that I hope to learn over the next 40+ years of my career, I feel both excited and anxious. By sharing these insights with you, I hope you think more progressively about your career – independent of whether you are at Google, McKinsey, a small start-up or the company of your parents. The employer really doesn't matter, what matters is with what mindset and attitude you approach the many opportunities and relationships that you come across throughout your professional life.

Much love, Omid. More on moonstorming.com!

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