Success Stories :

It never ceases to amaze me how much time people waste searching endlessly for magic shortcuts to entrepreneurial success and fulfillment when the only real path is staring them right in the face: real entrepreneurs who start real businesses that employ real people who provide real products and services to real customers.

Yes, I know that’s hard. It's a lot of work. What can I say, that’s life. Besides, look on the bright side: You get to do what you want and you get to do it your way. There’s just one catch. You’ve got to start somewhere. Ideas and opportunities don’t just materialize out of thin air.

The only way I know to get started is by learning a marketable skill and getting to work. In my experience, that’s where the ideas, opportunities, partners, and finances always seem to come from. Sure, it also takes an enormous amount of hard work, but that just comes with the territory.

If you want to do entrepreneurship right, here are eight stories you’ve probably never heard about companies you’ve most definitely heard of.

**The Pierre Omidyar way.** In 1995, a computer programmer started auctioning off stuff on his personal website. AuctionWeb, as it was then known, was really just a personal project, but, when the amount of web traffic made it necessary to upgrade to a business Internet account, Omidyar had to start charging people fees. He actually hired his first employee to handle all the payment checks. The site is now known as eBay.

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**The John Ferolito and Don Vultaggio way.** Back in the 70s, a couple of Brooklyn friends started a beer distributor out of the back of an old VW bus. Two decades later, after seeing how well Snapple was doing they decided to try their hand at soft drinks and launched AriZona Green Tea. Today, AriZona teas are #1 in America and distributed worldwide. The friends still own the company.

**The Matt Maloney and Mike Evans way.** When a couple of Chicago software developers working on lookup searches for Apartments.com got sick of calling restaurants in search of takeout food for dinner, the light bulb went off: Why isn’t there a one-stop shop for food delivery? That’s when the pair decided to start GrubHub, which went public last April and is now valued at more than $3 billion.

**The Joe Coulombe way.** After operating a small chain of convenience stores in southern California, Joe Coulombe had an idea: that upwardly mobile college grads might want something better than 7-11. So he opened a tropical-themed market in Pasadena, stocked it with good wine and booze, hired good people, and paid them well. He added more locations near universities, then healthy foods, and that’s how Trader Joe’s got started.

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**The Howard Schultz way.** A trip to Milan gave a young marketer working for a Seattle coffee bean roaster an idea for upscale espresso cafes like they have all over Italy. His employer had no interest in owning coffee shops but agreed to finance Schultz’s endeavor. They even sold him their brand name, Starbucks.

**The Phil Robertson way.** There was a guy who so loved duck hunting that he chose that over playing pro football for the NFL. He invented a duck call, started a company called Duck Commander, eventually put his son Willy in charge, and that spawned a media and merchandising empire for a family of rednecks known as Duck Dynasty.

**The Konosuke Matsushita way.** In Japan in 1917, a 23-year-old apprentice at the Osaka Electric Light Company with no formal education came up with an improved light socket. His boss wasn’t interested so young Matsushita started making samples in his basement. He later expanded with battery-powered bicycle lamps and other electronic products. Matsushita Electric, as it was known until 2008 when the company officially changed its name to Panasonic, is now worth $66 billion.

**The Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs way.** While they had been friends since high school, the two college dropouts gained considerable exposure to the computer world while working on game software together on the night shift at Atari. The third Apple founder, Ron Wayne, was also an Atari alumnus.

As I always say, the world is full of infinite possibilities and countless opportunities, but your life and career are finite, meaning you have limited time to find what you’re searching for and make your mark on the world. This is your time. It’s limited so don’t waste it. Find something you like to do and just do it. That’s how real entrepreneurs always start.