**Successful Entrepreneurs, A-students or B-students?**

Bo Peabody

**1** My mom used to always say, “Bo, you could go to Harvard or to the local community college; no matter what, you’ll always get a B.”

**2** Mom was right.

**3** B-students don’t know everything about anything and are excellent at nothing. B-students do, however, know something about a lot of things, and they can complete almost any task with some modicum of competence. People often ask me: “As an entrepreneur, what exactly do you do?” My answer: “I do nothing. But I do it very well.” Entrepreneurs are B-students. There is no one thing they do well. But there are many things they do well enough.

**4** A-students, on the other hand, know a lot about one thing, whether it is technology or marketing or sales or finance. And they do this one thing extremely well. If they don’t do it well, it bothers them. A-students want to do things perfectly all the time. This is a very bad trait for an entrepreneur, but a very good trait for a manager.

**5** The biggest downside of the entrepreneur’s penchant to understand everything about nothing and a little bit about a lot of things is that they get bored quickly with any one task. The ability to focus and be patient is typically associated not with entrepreneurs but with managers. Entrepreneurs want results immediately, while managers are happy to wait, confident that if they execute perfectly over time the results will eventually follow.

**6** An entrepreneur’s short attention span allows him, or maybe even forces him, to think laterally. Because managers, on the other hand, can stay focused on one topic for a long period of time, they are able to — in fact prefer to — think in a more linear fashion. Lateral thinking is necessary in a start-up where the entrepreneur is constantly being pulled off course when plans don’t go as planned, while linear thought is required in more mature companies where getting several hundred or several thousand people to stick to a plan is absolutely necessary to get anything done.

**7** Whenever I speak to a group of business school students, I run them through a little game. I ask everyone who ever started a business to raise his or her hand. Typically, about half of the people do. I then ask those who are still running that same business to keep their hands up. Very few do. I then propose that those who raised their hands and then put them down are typical entrepreneurs: great at starting things, but maybe not so great at managing them. I conclude by recommending that these entrepreneurs take a look at the people who didn’t raise their hands, jot down their names, give them a call next time they are about to start a business, and ask them to run it. Those people are the managers.

**8** The most important thing to realize when you’re a B-student entrepreneur is that you need A-student managers. You must listen to them. You have no choice. The good news is that A-students must listen to B-students, because B-students know about aspects of life and business that A-students know nothing about. While most A-students are really good at one thing, they tend to be completely out to lunch when it comes to almost everything else. On the other hand, B-students are really being sort of good at everything. The sooner the B-students and the A-students understand and appreciate each other, the more productive everyone will be.

**9** I had a standing bet with the programmers at Tripod, all of whom were A-students. The bet was that I could configure a web server before any of them could raise $1 million. The stakes of the bet: my founder’s share of Tripod stock for their smaller share. To raise $1 million from investors, you must be able to talk intelligently, or at least convincingly, about every aspect of a business. To configure a web server — an extremely complicated task — you must forget about every other aspect of the business and focus on that alone. One of the reasons Tripod worked so well is that no programmer ever took me up on that bet. Neither side wanted to win. I knew just enough about how to configure a web server to scare them, and they were so good at configuring web servers that it scared me. We knew we needed each other.

**10** There are, of course, exceptions to the A-student/B-student rule. We all know at least one. Take Bill Gates for instance, who both founded Microsoft and managed it into the largest corporation in the world. While Bill Gates never graduated from Harvard, he did go there and he did get A’s. Or consider Warren Buffett, who started Berkshire Hathaway and manages it to this very day. Warren got his A’s at Wharton. Or Matt Harris, my co-founder of Village Ventures, who not only helped start the company but also serves as its managing partner. I don’t know Bill or Warren, but I do know Matt. And while I went to neither Harvard nor my local community college, I did go to college with Matt. And he got A’s in half the time it took me to get B’s. I know this is true because we shared a room, and I was in that room studying a hell of a lot more than he was.

**11** In the end, the job of entrepreneurs is to attract, organize, and motivate A-student managers. And the only way we can do that is to realize, accept, and embrace the fact that we are B-students. One B and a slew of A’s is a very good report card at any school.

**成功企业家，会是A等生，还是B等生？**

博·皮博迪

1 我母亲过去一直说，“博，你上哈佛也好，上社区大学也罢，不管上哪个，你的成绩只会是B等。”

2 母亲说对了。

3 B等生不求甚解，诸事不精。不过，B等生见多识广，而且什么事都能做得像模像样。人们常常问我，“作为一个企业家，你究竟做些什么？”我的回答是：“我不具体做什么，但我什么都做得很好。”企业家们是B等生，他们不精于一事，但许多事都能做得很好。

4 A等生恰好相反，不论是技术、市场营销、销售或金融，他们会对某一项知之甚详。而且，他们把所知之事做得极好。如果没做好，他们会深感不安。A等生做事总想尽善尽美。对企业家而言这可是个缺点，但对经理而言却是优点。

5 企业家的特点是什么都不通，又什么都懂一点，其最大的不足在于他们会很快厌倦某项工作。专注和耐心，这样的能力通常与企业家无关，却是经理的典型特点。企业家们希望马上得到结果，而经理们却乐意等待，他们相信功到自然成。

6 企业家注意力集中时间短，这使得他能，甚至可以说迫使他进行横向思维。与之相反，经理们可以长时间专注于某一主题，他们能够——实际上更愿意——进行线性思维。横向思维对新创企业很有必要，企业家在计划执行不顺时需时常改变既定方案；而较成熟的企业则要用线性思维，在这样的企业里，要完成任务，就完全有必要让成百上千的员工坚决执行计划。

7 每次我给商学院学生演讲时，我都要让他们做一个小游戏。我让曾经创办过企业的学生举手。通常，会有大概一半的人举手。然后，我让仍在经营其所创企业的人举着手不放。这次只有很少的人了。接着，我说那些举了手然后又放下的人就是典型的企业家：擅长开启局面，但也许不那么擅长经营。我结束演讲时建议这些企业家们留意那些没有举手的人，记下他们的名字，下次创业时给他们打个电话，请他们来经营。那些人就是经理。

8 如果你是一个B等生企业家，你该想到的最重要的事情是你需要A等生经理。你得听取他们的意见。你别无选择。好消息是A等生得听B等生的，因为B等生所懂得的人生和生意的一些领域，在A等生们那却是一片空白。尽管多数A等生确实擅长某事，但在其他众多方面，却不甚在行。相反，B等生确实每件事都能干得像模像样。B等生和A等生的相互理解与欣赏来得越快，彼此就会变得越高效。

9 我和健鼎科技的程序员们打过一个赌，且长期有效。这些程序员都是A等生。打赌的内容是：在他们中任何人筹集到100万美元之前，我得配置好一个网络服务器。我们的赌注是：如果我输了，就用我拥有的健鼎科技创始人股份交换他们的小额股份。要从投资者手上筹集到100万美元，你必须在交谈中体现你的高智商，至少让人相信，你对生意中的方方面面了如指掌。配置网络服务器是一项非常复杂的任务，你必须抛开生意中的其他各方事宜，全心专注于此。健鼎科技能运营良好，其中一个原因在于，没有任何程序员来和我打这个赌。我们双方都不想赢。我对配置网络服务器有一定了解，足以吓倒他们。他们在这方面如此擅长，我自愧不如。有一点我们非常清楚，我们都需要对方。

10 当然，A等生、B等生的这种区分也有例外。我们至少知道一个。比如比尔·盖茨，他既创立了微软，又将其经营成为全世界最大的公司。尽管比尔·盖茨没有从哈佛毕业，但他的确上了哈佛，而且得过A等。或者想想沃伦·巴菲特，他创立了伯克希尔·哈撒韦公司，并一直经营到今天这一步。沃伦在沃顿求学时得了A等。再来看我维利基创投的联合创始人马特·哈里斯，他不仅协助创办了这家公司，而且还是公司的经营合伙人。我不了解比尔，也不了解沃伦，但我绝对了解马特。尽管我没上成哈佛也没去社区大学，我却和马特一起上了大学。他总能得A等，而我花了两倍的时间却只得了B等。我清楚这些，因为我跟马特是室友，就是在这个宿舍里我花了比他多得多的时间学习。

11 总之，企业家的工作是吸引、组织和激励A等生经理们。要做到这一点，我们必须认识、接受并庆幸我们是B等生的事实。无论在哪个学校，得一个B和一连串的A都是非常好的成绩单。