



# **AWESOME INC**



# **CULTURE BOOK**

*Version 4.1 | Q1 2025*



# CULTURE BOOK

*An inside look at the growing culture of Awesome Inc*



Version 4.1 | Q1 2025

## RULE #1

*All rules are made to be bent or broken.*



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## RULE #4

*Always do something awesome over something not awesome.*



## INTRODUCTION

So, what is Awesome Inc? Besides being awesome, Awesome Inc is an epicenter for entrepreneurship and technology. In short, Awesome Inc exists to create and grow high tech, creative and entrepreneurial companies and communities. We work with the biggest ambitions, the smartest brains, and the coolest people in the community. We give them the resources, the connections, and the space to pursue their own definition of awesome.

# AWESOME HISTORY



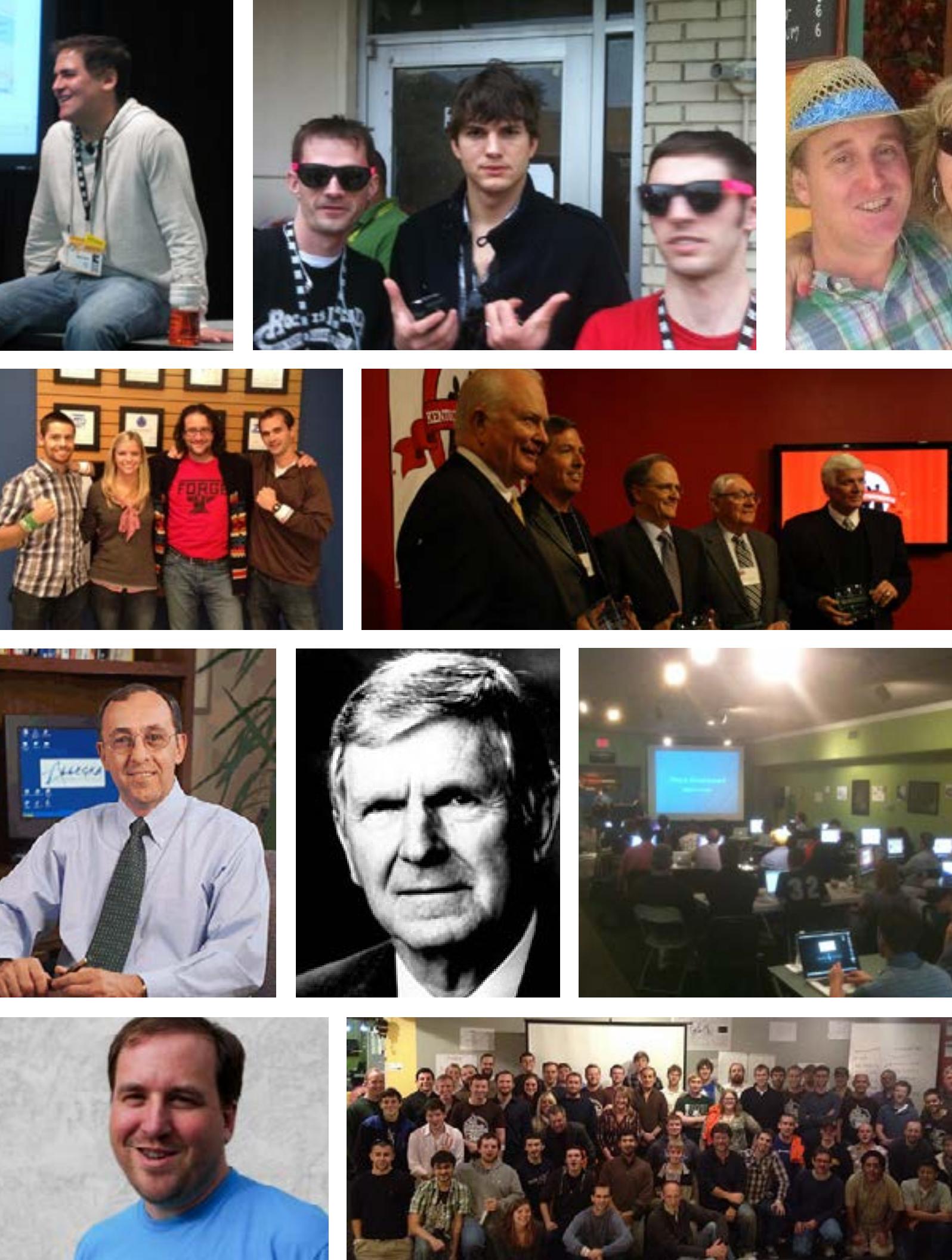
Awesome Inc was founded in 2009 by Brian Raney, Luke Murray, Nathan Fort, and Rachel Cunningham. With big dreams and even bigger drive, not to mention emptying out their bank accounts, taking out loans, and begging on the streets, these twenty-something year old entrepreneurs opened the doors of Awesome Inc at 348 East Main Street in Lexington, KY.

We've met some awesome people along the way. At SXSW in 2010 we met Mark Cuban, billionaire entrepreneur and Ashton Kutcher, an actor with a passion for entrepreneurship and investing in startups. Lou Allegra has been an instrumental mentor and has influenced the direction of Awesome Inc significantly. Jay Knoblett has been a fantastic friend and resource for us here at Awesome Inc, as well as one of our biggest supporters to date. We rolled seven deep into Techstars demo day in Boulder, CO in the summer of 2010. While there we met David Cohen, one of the inspirations for starting Awesome Inc. Another rockstar we met was Ralph G. Anderson, creator of one of the most successful engineering firms in the Midwest, Belcan. In 2012, we got to play host to Brad Feld for a few days as he spent time in KY talking about Startup Communities. These individuals, along with many others, have helped shape the way Awesome Inc is today. With the launch of the coworking space, Awesome Inc sought to add budding entrepreneurs and new companies to the startup community. In our first 6 months we were home to 10 great companies. 15 years later, in 2024, we were home to 68 companies and served over 300 companies in Kentucky.

As Awesome Inc grew, we began to attract more and more attention from businesses and entrepreneurs all over Kentucky. We received some good press in 2009 and 2010 for hosting events such as mobileX, Startup Weekend, and the Kentucky Entrepreneur Hall of Fame. Word began to spread and the Awesome Inc culture began to take off.



Top to bottom, left to right:  
Mark Cuban · Ashton Kutcher · Jay Knoblett  
Brad Feld · Entrepreneur Hall of Fame 2010  
Lou Allegra · Ralph G. Anderson · Mobile MiniConference 2009  
David Cohen · Start Up Weekend 2012



# THIS IS NOT WORK. THIS IS AWESOME.



## WORK IS AN OCCUPATION...

No more complicated than doing the dishes or moving your furniture. Chores like these are things you will likely be doing all your life, whether you want to or not. You do it because you like it, and you do it well; because of the way it makes others feel; because that makes you happy.

There's a reason people take pride in "a job well done." Where work is a measurement of your time, money, and Joules; a job is a measurement of your dedication and love. The greatest of these is love. We do best the things that we love to do...and what we do here is innovate.



## RULE #22

*Go big or don't be my friend*

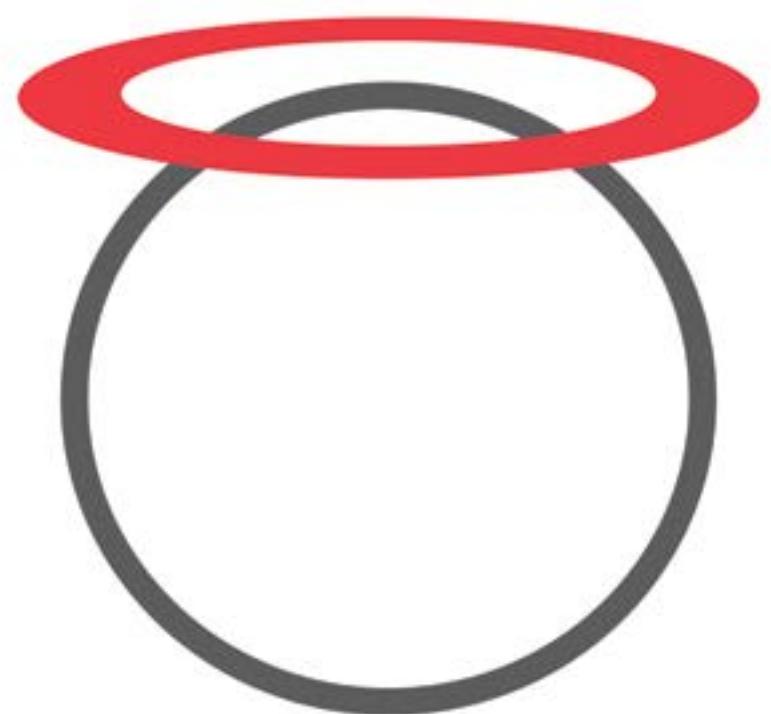


## CORE VALUES

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Awesome Inc maintains four core values that inform every decision and illustrate what Awesome Inc stands for. They are: 1) Be: Good 2) Be: Excellent 3) Be: A Friend and 4) Be: You. Team Alpha members and employees are trained on these four values and encouraged to not only practice them at Awesome Inc, but to adopt them in their own lives. These core values take precedence over all our silly rules and traditions and help us to pursue our goal of "starting and growing high tech, creative, and entrepreneurial companies in communities...in fun, cool ways." Below are the four core values and their corresponding descriptions.

# Core Value #1



**be: Good**

**Live with honesty and integrity:**

- a. Honesty - Tell the truth
- b. Integrity - Have moral principles and follow them

**Serve others:**

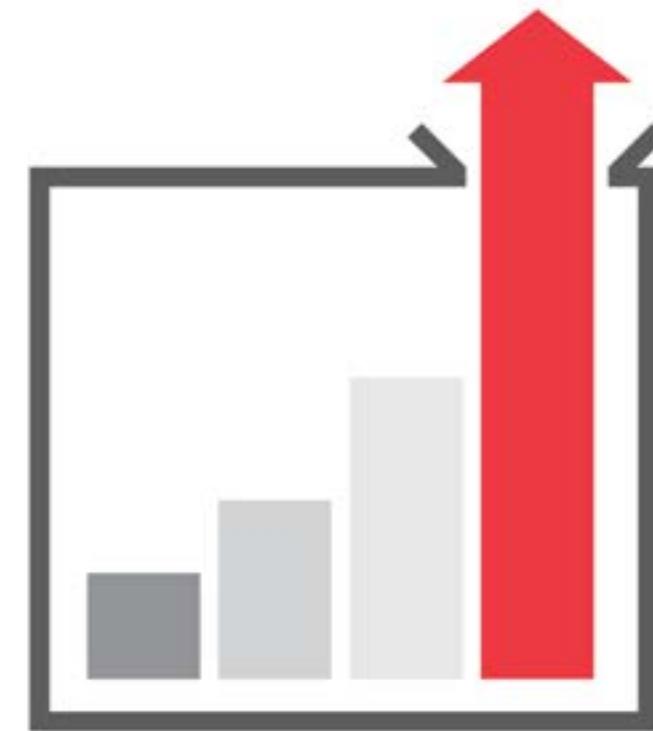
- a. Be a good & selfless person
- b. Use your life to benefit the world
- c. It's about the product; not about you

You have to start here if the rest of your project, this business, or your life is going to fulfill you and ultimately be worth doing, working at, or living, respectively. You can't do something that you don't believe in, that you don't think matters, that goes against what you know is 'right' and 'good' in your heart and be able to look your soul in the mirror... much less share it with the world with pride. Don't waste your time working on something that you believe doesn't

matter - not that it has to be the most important task in the world, or even the most important task in your world, but it has to be a task that's pushing forward something you believe in, that you know will touch people in a way that you know is really 'good'. Another aspect of being good is being honest - always telling the truth and having integrity - staying true to your core values. If you're not honest (your FF & SS are high), then people can't count on

what you say you have done or will do, so it's impossible to work with you. If you don't have integrity... well... then this whole list is pointless because you won't live by these standards. Many of the most well-respected people to ever live became so because of their commitment to their principles. We feel that this is not only critical to being well-respected, but one of the most important parts of being awesome as well.

# Core Value #2



**be: Excellent**

**Be a winner:**

- a. Have a winning mind-set
- b. Create winning habits

**Execute:**

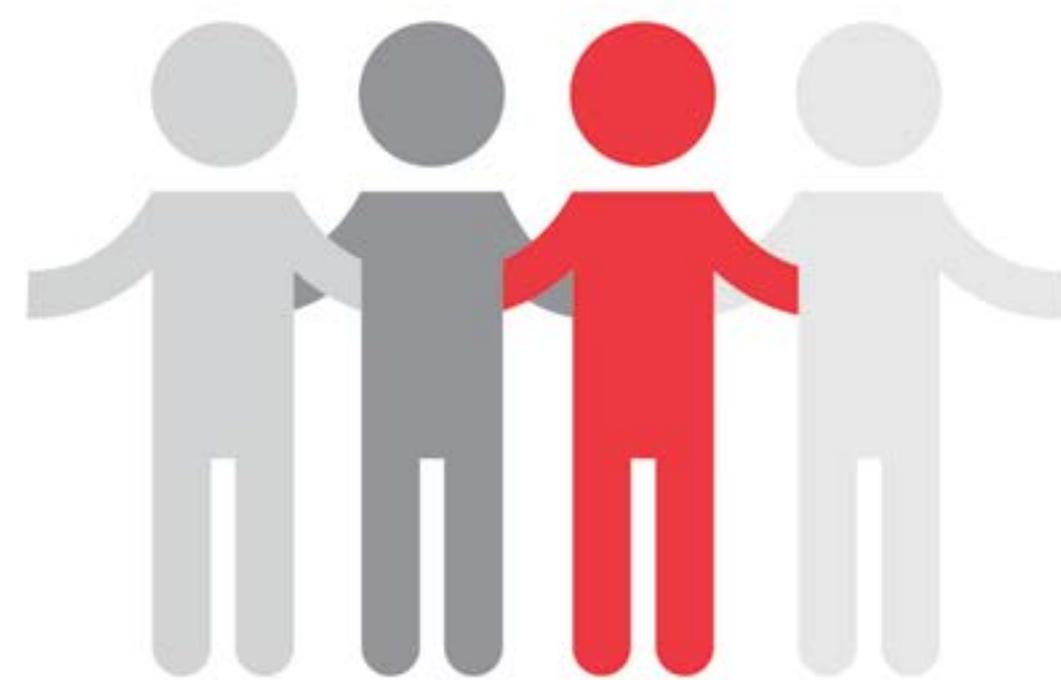
- a. Do what you say you are going to do
- b. Work harder, work smarter

If you are doing something you believe matters in a way that is in line with your moral code or your sense of purpose, it follows that you shouldn't then be able to accept an end result that you know isn't excellent. It's not that this result of excellence happens on your first try, or even your second or third, but that excellence is unanimously agreed upon as the final result, and anything less would be

morally unacceptable to all those involved because of their belief in Core Value #1. This is both an internal, subjective commitment to mastery as well as a completely objective measure of results. In other words, excellence means 'do your best no matter what', but this maxim also doesn't become an excuse for not actually creating results. In order to have a company of people who produce results,

each person has to be committed to improving and mastering themselves. In order to have a group of people who are committed to improving and mastering themselves, you need to have a culture that expects stellar results.

# Core Value #3



## be: A Friend

### Bring the fun:

- a. To yourself - You are responsible for your own fun & happiness
- b. To others - If you aren't giving your customers & coworkers happiness in some form, you aren't giving them what they want.

### Nothing is more awesome than people:

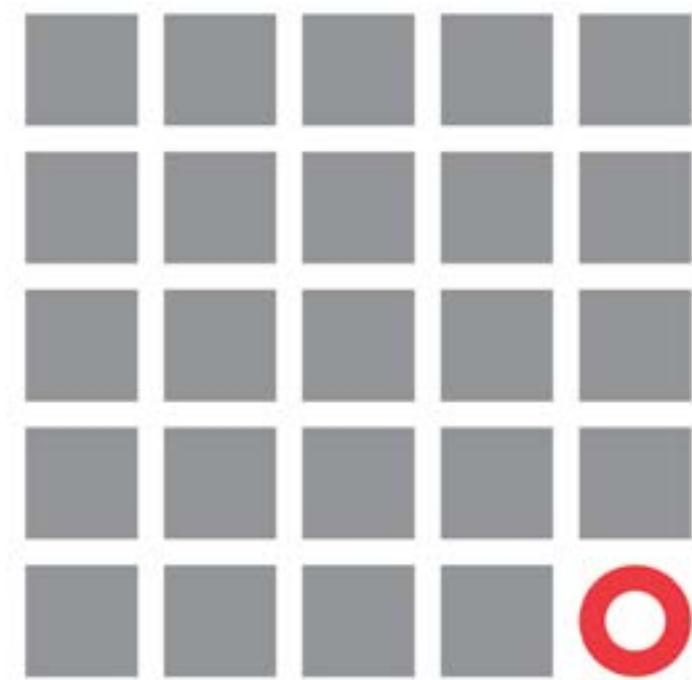
- a. 'Do life' with your coworkers
- b. Love your customer and treat them like a human being

Any great undertaking isn't done along, and even if it could be, we aren't interested in doing it that way. We exist to serve others. We work next to others in pursuit of this vision. Human beings crave connection. Companies are communities. To deny any of these things is to deny reality and the happiness that comes from enjoying the company of those around us. We want to connect with others who care about what

we care about. We want to deeply understand the problems and desires and lives of those we hope to serve. We can't do this with 'coworkers' or as a 'company'.. we can only do it as a community of friends and teammates, committing to do good with excellence for customers we care about. While som less than perfect teams have produced occasional excellence, no dysfunctional team ever became a

dynasty. More importantly, no team has enjoyed pursuing something no matter how good the cause or how committed to excellence everyone was, if nobody liked anyone else. People crave connection, and we figure that the easiest way to make a friend is to be one.

# Core Value #4



## be: You

### Forget 'em:

- a. Be secure in your principles and your mission
- b. Hear the naysayers, but don't listen to them

### Do your thing:

- a. Own it - Be passionate, be yourself
- b. Know it - Be clear, be an expert

### Game will recognize game:

- a. Be more concerned with your character than your reputation
- b. If you are behaving like the right kind of person, you will attract the right kind of people

This one is last for a reason. If you aren't a person who's naturally committed to being good, excellent, a friend... then we don't want you to be you... actually, we don't want you, period. Awesome Inc isn't about you because, as the first Core Value clearly states, it's about 'being good' by doing good, putting integrity and honesty up front and making sure that the focus is onthe product or service and the benefits it

provides in the lives of our customers. But if those first three Core Values deeply jive with who you are, then there's no reason you can't bring the rest of 'you' to the table. Actually, we insist that you do just that. It's why you're a part of the team - not just for your specific skill set, but because of who you are as an individual. As long as you share the foundational principles with everyone else, the type of music you like,

the clothes you wear, your essence - however you define it - is an important part of what makes Awesome Inc truly Awesome.

## RULE #41

*The only rule of execution:  
Do what you say you're  
going to do and do it fast.*



## FOUNDERS

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These are the awesome people who started it all. Read their stories to learn a little bit about the founders of Awesome Inc, and find out what they're all about.

# ABOUT OUR FOUNDERS



## BRIAN RANEY

Brian founded his first software company, BookExchange, while in college. After that failed, he founded APAX Software in 2007, and has served as the company's CEO since it launched. He helped the company grow to an INC 5000 company (in 2020) and continues to operate as one of the top software development firms in the region. In 2008, Brian co-founded the Young Entrepreneurs of Lexington organization, which sparked the creation of Awesome Inc in 2009. He was honored as the Lexington Young Entrepreneur of the Year in 2010. Brian likes to surf, snowboard, play (and coach) soccer, and do just about anything with his friends as long as it involves good conversation and drinking Mountain Dew.



## LUKE MURRAY

Luke received his BS from UK in the Business Administration of Medicine in 2004 and started bookexchange.com with Brian Raney that same year. He got his MBA in 2006 from UK, worked for UK hospital from 2006-2007, then Southwestern the summer of 2007 and started medical school at UK in the fall of 2007. He started Awesome Inc with Brian Raney in the Spring of 2009 with the hope of attracting and retaining the highest potential people in the areas of technology, creativity, and entrepreneurship. Luke completed Medical School at UK in 2013 and residency in 2016. He likes to play guitar and piano...and to talk too much sometimes.



## NATHAN FORT

Nathan co-founded Awesome Inc in 2009 to create, improve and expand the entrepreneur community in the Bluegrass. During his undergraduate studies, Nathan teamed up with co-founders Brian Raney and Luke Murray to expand the UK Bookexchange into a nationwide service, Bookexchange.com. Upon graduating from the University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law, Nathan established the Fort Law Group in Louisville, Kentucky. As managing partner, Nathan is passionate about helping his clients grow their business. In his downtime, Nathan enjoys playing with new technologies, investment trading and traveling.



## NICK SUCH

Nick helped launch Awesome Labs to better connect collegiate engineering students with entrepreneurial opportunities. An alumnus of the University of Kentucky's College of Engineering, Nick led the UK Solar Car Team to its highest ever finish: 2nd place at FSGP 2009. Before Awesome Inc, he gained engineering and venture capital experience with GE, Toyota, and KSTC. For a few years, Nick thought that he wanted to get an MBA, but after gaining admission offers from Harvard and Stanford, he turned down both to continue pursuing BuildingLayer, a startup that evolved from out of the first class of the Awesome Labs program. Nick now dedicates his time to growing Awesome Inc U coding school. He also enjoys riding all types of bicycles, "reading" audio books, and blogging, but seldom all three simultaneously.



## RACHEL CUNNINGHAM

I'd like to take a minute just sit right there. I'll tell you how I became a founder of Awesome Inc here. In central Lexington born and raised, riding my bike is where I spent most of my days. Then studying at Furman and graduated in '05 I spent some time in Chile and taught for a while. Then a couple of guys, named Luke and Brian told me about their idea and would I buy in? I got excited about growing business in my hometown, and started spendin all of my time on the best incubator around.

## RULE #17

*Bring the fun*



## TEAM ALPHA

Team Alpha is Awesome Inc's group of interns, but don't let them hear you call them that...because they are way more than a typical team of interns. Team Alpha is the engine that runs Awesome Inc. Every event, website, video, blog post, tweet, and graphic you see at Awesome Inc is in some way developed or influenced by Team Alpha.



Team Alpha started in Awesome Inc's 1st year of operation. There were four members on the first team which started in the Fall of 2009 - Therese Henrickson, Simeon Kondev, Ashley Williams, and Sarah Frank. Therese became Awesome Inc's first ever employee and eventually became the Director of Daily Activity for Awesome Inc, managing the space, events, and just about everything else Awesome Inc did. In the Spring of 2010, the Team grew to 20 members:

Therese Henrickson

Julie Babbage

Maddy Knoblett

Whitney Fraley

Walker Miller

Clay Rehmel

Hilary Perrine

Zach Magoto

Bert Berry

Shannon Eblen

Adam Martin

Sade' Webb

Dilli Chhetri

Krishna Adhikari

Jachin Campbell

Desny Guerrier

Craig D. Usher

Matthew Storrs (aka: Cool)

Eric Prince

Chase Bullock

Each member had their own project or projects ranging from hosting creative fashion show events, to managing social media, to programming tasks. Later in 2010 Team Alpha formed sub teams for the various tasks. Team Alpha quickly became the productivity engine that was responsible for all the initiatives of Awesome Inc. It was Team Alpha that enabled the Awesome Inc to host over 250 events (including 8 mobile tech conferences in 5 different cities), help start and grow over 100 companies, and help grow the Lexington startup community in it's first four years of operation.



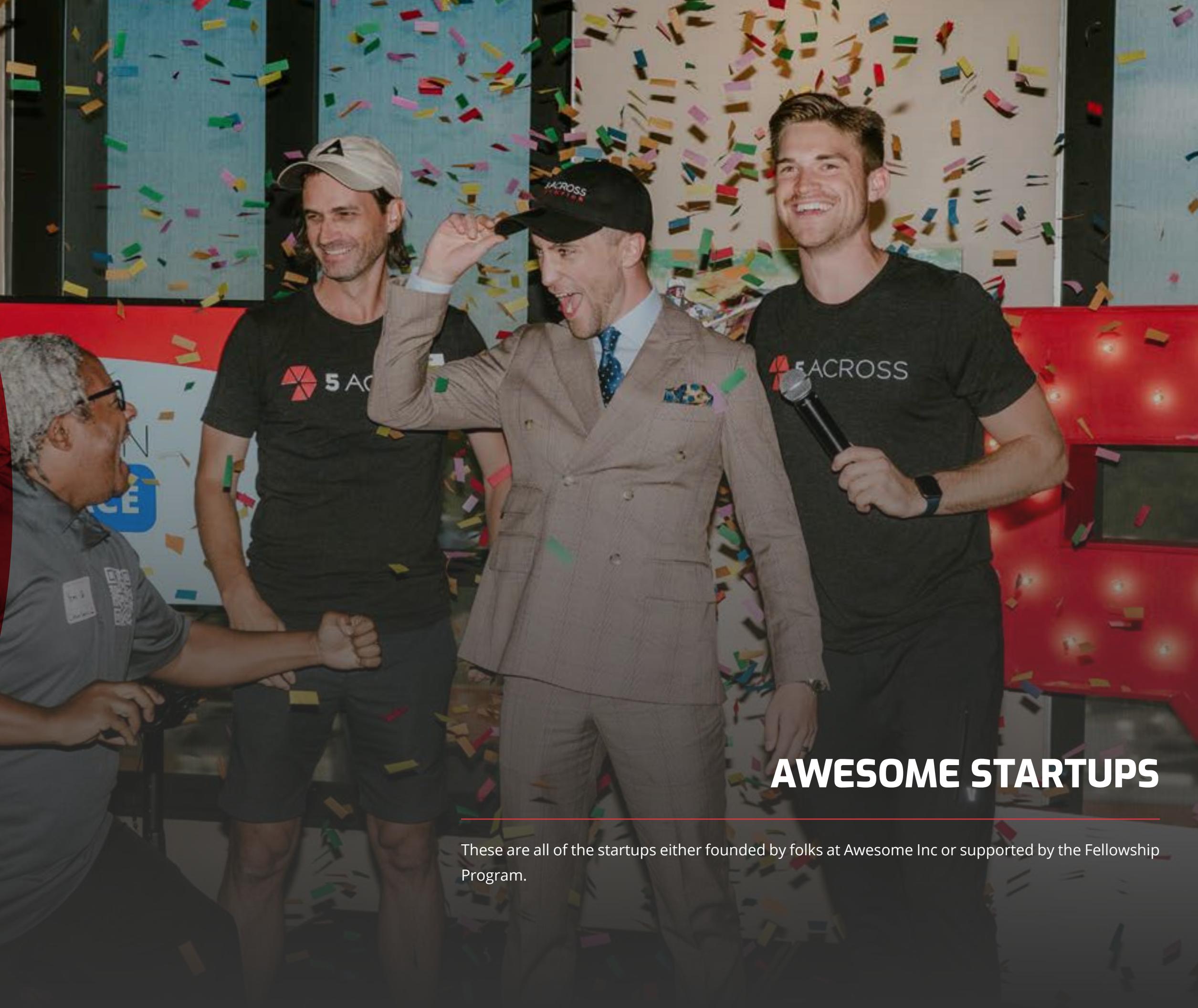


Awesome Inc would not be what it is today without this team.  
Here's a list of all the Team Alpha members as of March 2025:

Aaron Fons	Autumn Hines	Clinton Noble	Evan Blanford	Jameson Chesser	Khalid Rashad	Maryrose Ramsey	Owen Wirth	Scott Johnson	Tuan Ho
Aaron HuSun	Avis Sampson	Cody James	Evan Leach	Jamie Pridemore	Klaine Hughes	Matt Boyer	Pam Stein	Scott Manning	Tylar Culver
Ayat Ali	Ben Askren	Colin Carver	Evie Link	Jasmine Hart	Krishna Adhikari	Matt Curtin	Parker Householder	Scott Wagner	Tyler Bromagen
Abby Brady	Ben Childress	Colin Smith	Francesco Serio	Jason Harrison	Krista Osmundson	Matt Smith	Peter Briggs	Sean Owsley	Tyler Chong
Abigail Birhman	Ben Jacoby	Colin Weeler	Garrett (William) Fahrbach	Jessica Powers	Kristian Toole	Matthew Kluemper	Peter Kaminski	Serra Doll	Tyler Green
Adam Chaffins	Ben Strevy	Conner Jones	Garrett Bonistalli	Jessika Jones	Kyle Raney	Matthew Storrs	Peter Regard	Shaena Neal	Tyler Smith
Adam Dahl	Ben Wilson	Craig D. Usher	Garrett Ebel	Jim Wombles	Kyle Vaughn	Max Dubocq	Petra Ronald	Shaikerra Brown	Vidy Pugalenthil
Adam Martin	Bert Berry	Da-un Chung	Garrett Ringler	Joe Torres	Landon Williams	Max Mosier	Phillip Habermann	Shannon Eblen	Walker Miller
Adam Shepherd	Blake Sweet	Daily Bates	Goose Goshorn	Joe Umanzor	Larry Reed, III	Megan Calme	PJ Targun	Shoba Dickinson	Wayne Harden
Alek Zieba	Bree Cox	Dalton Abner	Gordon Glenn	Joey Williams	Laura Banik	Megan Rose	Ranajay Sen	Simcha Heiser	Whitney Fraley
Alex Haas	Brendan Thompson	Dalton Fleshhood	Gus Logsdon	John Doty	Lauren Fleming	Megan Sizemore	Rebecca Fields	Simeon Kondev	Will Crawford
Alex Johnson	Brian Raney	Danny Thorne	Hamzah Khan	Jordan Caldwell	Lauren Ford	Melanie Stoeckle	Reece Walter	Simone Sergio	Will Garman
Alex Webb	Brice Harney	Dasha Kolyaskina	Hannah Eberts	Jordan DeLuce	Lauren Janesz	Meredith Scroggin	Reid Olash	Sisay Sulito	Will Oldham
Alexie Basil	Brittany Durham	Dave Boyer	Hannah Lane	Jordan Utz	Lauren Stein	Michael Lewis	Ricky Chen	Skye Brown	Will Salmen
Allison Cooper	Brooklyn Jung	David Booth	Harrison Kurz	Jordan Weiter	Laurie Ann Williams	Michael Lozovoy	Riley Friend	Sophia Shoemaker	Will Shapiro
Allister Littrell	Cailley Harris	David Caudill	Heather Seaton	Josh Deitel	Lawrence Rogers	Michael Riemand	Riley Stamper	Sophie Knight	Will Swinton-Ginsberg
Amanda Murray	Calah Ford	David McGee	Helen Pang	Josh Strange	Layth Rahman	Michael Ward	Robert Crispin	Stacy Haynes	William Keplinger
Amber Bowman	Caleb Geyer	Desny Guerrier	Henry Yan	Julia Wilson	Lee Morrow	Michael Zhang	Roshnee Raithatha	Stefan Hagfors	Xuetao Hong
Amie Huesman	Callie Justice	Diante Elcock	Hilary Perrine	Julie Babbage	Liam Chesser	Michelle Raney	Ross (Charles) Ladenburger	Stephanie Burton	Zach Frey
Amy Duncan	Camden Sloss	Dilli Chhetri	Holli Goff	Justin Raney	Lindsay Wheatley	Miguel Jimenez	Rossa Howard	Stephanie Dawson	Zach Magoto
Amy Rogers	Carly Guggenheim	Drake Witt (aka Rush)	Hollis Gargala	Kaitlyn Carr	Lindsey Brinkley	Monica Leslie	Rusty Leskiv	Stephanie Gavin	Zach Mann
Amy Wolterman	Carter Fifield	Drew Trommer	Humberto Rodriguez	Kal Littrell	Lindsey Grass	Myles Stringer	Ryan Copple	Stephen Ruh	Zach Wooldridge
Andrew Derenge	Cassidy Stamper	Drew Wisdom	Huu Nguyen	Kallie Rush	Lindsey Kirkpatrick	Natalie Brown	Ryan Harris	Steve Osowicz	Zack Anderson
Andrew Hampton	Celine Stroup	Dustin Peerce	Isaac Meisner	Kara Head	Linh Nguyen	Nate Graff	Sade' Webb	Susannah Sizemore	Zackary Johnson
Andrew Jones	Charlotte Arnold	Dylan Mordhorst	Isaac Rowe (aka Nerf)	Kara Smith	Lisa Kindel	Nathan Faulls	Sam Blake	Sydney Toth	Zain McCoy
Andrew Shields	Chase Bullock	Elise Waddell	Isaiah White	Kate Renaud	Liz Brown Evans	Nathan Nestor	Sam Mayne	Tasha Combs	Zeinab Akhavan
Angel Ho	Chase Northrip	Elizabeth Cooper	Jachin Campbell	Katharine Sagan	Liz Moore	Nathan Vranicar	Samantha Verissimo	Taylor Church	Zhuo Wang
Anjana Vedapuri	Chase Smith	Ella Presley	Jack Teegarden	Katie Sam Smith	Liz Stanley	Nathan Wallen	Samuel Hartman	Taylor Todd	
Anna Sergio	ChiEn Leow	Elliot Mawby	Jackson Holt	Katy Brown	Lizzie Moore	Nathan Wilson	Sara Hutson	Taylore Latham	
Antoni Vivanco	Chris Allen	Elzaba Anderson	Jackson Phillips	Kayden Teffeteller	Logan Jones	Nick Garnett	Sarah Brookbank	Theresa Simcic	
Aria Summers	Chris Irving	Emily Porter	Jackson Spears	Keith Kurzendoerfer	Luke Murray	Nick Jordan	Sarah Detraz	Therese Henrickson McMillan	
Ashley Biven	Chris Saad	Emily Wehrle	Jacob Collins	Keith McMunn	Mac Glidewell	Nick Sladic	Sarah Frank	Thomas Dimeny	
Ashley Edwards	Chris Smith	Eric Prince	Jacob Marquez	Kellen Casey	Mackenzie Hanes	Nick Such	Sarah Griffioen	Thomas Elwood	
Ashley Gallaher	Christine McAlister	Erica Clark	Jacob Spencer	Kelsey Joseph	Maddy Knoblett	Noah Wilcox	Sarah Hahn	Tj Barnett	
Ashley Williams	Christopher Walters	Erin Logsdon	Jacqueline Benson	Kennedi Brookins	Maggie Bellhorn	Nora Smith	Sarah Hasley	Tommy Crush	
Audrey Ward	Clark Conrad	Erin Renfroe	Jaiven Smith	Kerek Plummer	Maggie Bessette	Oakley Peavler	Sarah Hoffmann	Tori Sutkamp	
August Dutille	Clay Rehmel	Ethan Gamble	Jake Spencer	Kevin Joiner	Mallory Quisenberry	Olivia Hornback	Sarah Landers	Tran Le	
Augustus Logsdon	Clay Watson	Ethan Smith	Jake Tapia (aka: Fresh)	Kevin Mansur	Mark Hisle	Olivia Veirs	Savannah Jaskowiak	Trenton Shimizu	
Austin Magsig	Clay Winstead	Ethan Wooldridge	Jake Tapia (Fresh)	Kevin Moore	Marvin Anderson	Osamah Almutawa	Savannah Stow	Tres Phillips	

## RULE #76

*No excuses, play like a champion.*



## AWESOME STARTUPS

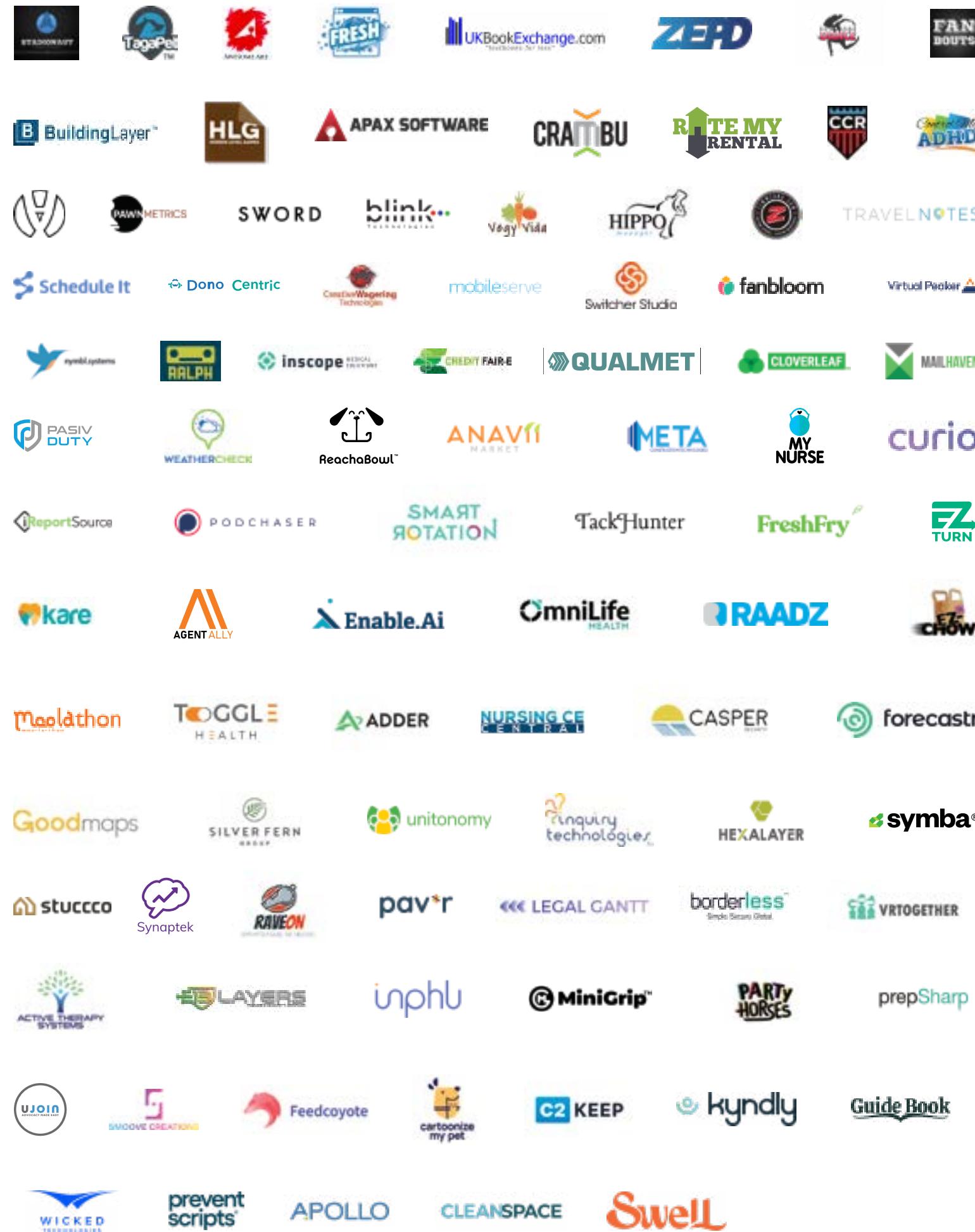
These are all of the startups either founded by folks at Awesome Inc or supported by the Fellowship Program.

# AWESOME INC

## FELLOWSHIP



The Awesome Fellowship Program is dedicated to supporting Kentucky tech startups with a dynamic community and essential resources for scaling. Tailored for full-time founders, the program provides a year-long package of valuable resources, including accountability, coaching, design and video services, web development assistance, and access to accounting & legal resources.



## RULE #45

*If you can't make it rain,  
stay out of the desert... And  
don't expect an  
invitation when I'm taking a  
trip across the Sahara.*



## AWESOME BLOG

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Excerpts, thoughts, and insights from our founders, team alpha members, and entrepreneurs. Keep reading at [awesomeinc.org/blog](http://awesomeinc.org/blog).

## FOCUS ON THE HOT DOG

by Luke Murray

*Published 2011*

I'm working with some UK students to start a door-to-door laundry service. When we got together for the first time a few months ago, I started to ask them all the things that we needed to do. There were plenty of things that came out from social media campaigns, to logos, business cards, a phone line, slogans, a domain name & website, etc. I then asked them what they thought most important things were that they should be doing. They started to prioritize the list to some degree, but for the most part they wanted to do all of it at once.

What the founders of a brand new laundry service weren't talking about: learning how to pick up, wash, dry, fold, and deliver laundry in large volumes efficiently and with minimal errors.

In case you didn't catch that, it was like a bunch of guys talking about starting their own pizza shop, and not even putting "learn how to make really good pizza" on their to do list, much less have it at the top, or even better, have it as THE ONLY THING THEY SHOULD SPEND THEIR TIME ON.

There, of course, is a case for marketing and carrying yourself in a way that you look legit. I even brought up the idea of having polo shirts with our logos on them (hey, even I can't resist talking about the fun stuff, I mean, it's fun!). When you dress not just professionally (which doesn't cost you anything, remember? You already have polo shirts and khakis in your closet) but are branded professionally (business card, logo on your shirt, slick website, 800 number, etc.) it adds a level of confidence to the salesman or other company representative that is trying to convince the bank, or customer, or supplier to do business with us. This confidence, coupled with branded, professional appearance of the company representative, indeed do combine to improve your chances of closing a sale, a supplier, a loan, etc. But given the limited nature of your most valuable resource, your time, I would allocate more of it to washing laundry or making pizzas than I would to installing phone lines and putting up a fancy website for a few important reasons...

*Keep reading at awesomeinc.org/blog*

## WHAT MATTERS TO YOU MOST, AND WHY?

by Nick Such

*Published 2011*

The title of this post is also the first question posed to students applying to the Stanford Graduate School of Business. This question almost seems almost too personal for an MBA program, but then again, the GSB isn't any ordinary MBA program. I was one of the lucky students who made it through that rigorous application process, and even survived 96% of my 2-year deferral period. But last week, I decided to decline Stanford's offer of admission for the MBA class of 2013 in order to keep leading my startup company, AwesomeTouch. For those of you who I haven't already talked with in person, I'd like to explain why.

If you're looking for the short version, here it is:

1. I discovered that I don't need an MBA to run a company.
2. I love what I'm doing right now, and who I'm working with.

OK, now for the longer version. If you don't know the full story of why I was going to Stanford in the first place, I'll start with a recap. I spent most of my life wanting to be an engineer, which led me to engineering school. While I was there, I lead a student team where we designed and raced solar-powered cars. While doing that, I realized that I just liked being around engineers, not necessarily being one. I had heard that combining an engineering degree with an MBA was a good way to do this, and my dad has an MBA, so I applied to the program at my university.

This was when my friend Luke told me that an MBA wasn't really about the classes, it was about meeting people, and that staying at my alma mater wouldn't get me that many new connections. He suggested I try some top-tier schools, like Harvard or Stanford. Since I hadn't heard of any others (yeah, I was that naive), I applied to both. I'm really good at standardized tests (which would be a useless skill if our educational system wasn't so messed up), so I rocked the GMAT. With a few awesome letters of recommendation from peers, bosses, and professors, I got into both. I visited Harvard, but ruled it out. Ivy League seemed too stuffy for me. So, Stanford, here I come..

*Keep reading at awesomeinc.org/blog*



Support Your Local Startups  
Be a customer.

## WHY "STARTUP COMMUNITIES" IS EVEN BIGGER THAN I REALIZED

by Nick Such

Published 2012

After spending a few days hanging out with Brad Feld, I've come to the conclusion that Startup Communities is not simply a book targeted at the minority of the population who currently identify themselves as entrepreneurs. What Brad is working on is actually much bigger. My conclusion stems from the idea that he left ringing in my head following his visit to Kentucky: "Every city was once a startup."

I spent most of this morning researching the history of the founding of my city, Lexington, Kentucky. As Brad discussed his thoughts about startup communities, he kept referring to the "natural resources" present in a community. In the early days of the geographic area that would come to be known as Kentucky, a few people made the conscious choice to settle here. While their decision was not fully informed (they did not yet have TripAdvisor to review all the possible places to settle on the North American continent), they did the best they could with the available information in the late 1700s. They actively chose the Bluegrass region for its fertile soil, access to fresh water, and moderate climate. For a startup agrarian community, these are key ingredients. For a startup technology community, the key ingredients are much less geophysical. They're human. As codified in Brad's book, these ingredients include leadership by entrepreneurs, a long-term growth perspective, an inclusive culture, and events that engage and connect all members of the community.

I spent most of last evening discussing the fertile nature of Lexington with my friends over drinks. We've come to realize that our city has an abundance of untapped human potential..

*Keep reading at awesomeinc.org/blog*



## FORGET 'EM... DO YOUR THING!

by Brian Raney

Published 2011

We have a lot of codes, rules, and culture stories at Awesome Inc. We have the public favorite, rule #4: "always do something awesome over something not awesome". We have our soundtrack that includes the song, the other song, the thing and number 3. We have some secret hand shakes and some silly dances.

Another one of our core values at Awesome Inc is "Forget em...do your thing" (rule #2, credit Luke Murray, 2009). No matter what your mission, there are going to be people that agree with you and there are going to be people that disagree with you. Your critics get even louder as you become more influential.

It is so tempting to try to respond to all of these people that take a position against your initiative. Honestly, it makes you feel better in the short run to defend yourself to your critics. It's nice to blow off some steam and try to convince everyone why your position is right in hopes to win over your naysayers.

To be blunt, this is pointless behavior. Most of the time you aren't going to win anyone over and every second you spent defending yourself should have been spent pursuing your mission. It is simply a distraction that you have to disregard. As long as you're secure with your principles, and believe whole heartedly in your mission, there is no reason to be distracted from either of them. Focus on "your thing" and ignore your critics.

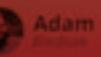
This doesn't mean don't listen to your customers or the people around you. This doesn't mean don't accept feedback or advice. This doesn't mean you're always right and everyone else is wrong. It means don't listen to your doubters, believe in yourself and trust that game recognize game.

I recently read an article about Bill Gates teaming up with Warren Buffet to raise \$600 Billion for charity(yes, that is a six with eleven zeros). They are calling the initiative Great Givers...

*Keep reading at awesomeinc.org/blog*

## BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEUR. AGAIN. AND AGAIN.

by Brian Raney  
Published 2011



Adam



## GAME RECOGNIZE GAME

by Luke Murray  
Published 2012



About four years ago I had a meeting with Dr. Todd about a business idea. During that meeting, I discussed with him two options I had as I finished my graduate degree from UK. Down one path was a steady programming job, a solid income, and all the comfort that comes with a safe career choice. Down the other path was launching my own software company. No clear sight of a paycheck, an extremely blurred vision of my future, and no real clue on where to even start. He gave me advice in that meeting that had a lasting effect. He said, "Brian, do you want to try to start your own business or not? Because you can always get a job in a year or two if that doesn't work out. You may not always be able to start your own business."

That quote influenced me to make a series of decisions that led to where I am today. I basically interpreted that as "Go big today...play it safe tomorrow". I decided that day to run my business full time. I recruited two of my engineering friends (one being my brother) to run my software company, APAX Software. Within two years we were doing over a million in revenue and had 20+ employees. Through the success of APAX, I was given another opportunity and therefore another decision to make about how to reinvest my share of our profits. I reflected on his advice again and thought, "I can play it safe and enjoy this situation of moderate success...or I can go big again and try to leverage this success and start something even riskier." My conclusion – I can always play it safe in a year or two.

The outcome of that conclusion is Awesome Inc. I reinvested all of my money into building Awesome Inc....

Game recognize game... your parents used to say "it takes one to know one", HR professionals say "A players hire A players, B players hire C players, and C players hire losers" all of them are permutations of the concept that 'like' will both recognize and attract 'like'.

At Awesome Inc our Team Alpha Captain Therese is an all-star A player. She conducts interviews and is the person that decides who does and doesn't get to join the team and if they do, in what capacity. I have complete faith in her intuition and her ability to recognize quality and the types of characteristics a person who would fit in and do well around here must have.

So go ahead and judge a book by its cover. It will save you a bunch of time and as long as you are paying attention to see which assumptions are incorrect you'll be able to correct as you go. Letting each person be a blank slate in every way and making no assumptions about their abilities, interests, personality, etc. would cause you to ultimately make some really stupid decisions.

"Jeff is really unorganized. I think I'll put him in this secretary role though because I don't want to judge him and assume he's going to be bad at that." Jeff may end up being a rock star administrative assistant for some weird reason (i.e. he really takes organization seriously when it's someone else's life he's organizing) but the fact is that he's probably going to stink....so don't put him there.

Again, trust your instincts and then (just as importantly) pay attention to OUTCOMES. This is pretty tough, because if Jeff has a messy desk but never drops a ball, responds quickly to emails, shows up to things on time, etc. then behind what looks chaotic is a system that apparently works...

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*Keep reading at awesomeinc.org/blog*

## THE ONLY THING THAT'S EASY IS TAKING A NAP

by Luke Murray

*Published 2011*

I have never met anyone that's ever done something of significance and when it was over say '*you know, it ended up taking way less time than we thought it would and it was sooo much easier than we expected*'. It just doesn't happen.

NOTHING is going to be as easy as you think. This is really important in a startup because you think about adding a new feature or doing some side project that is tangentially beneficial but not part of your core (your hot dog). During your thought process you realize that this isn't the most critical thing in the world to your business (which these are the ONLY types of things you should be spending your time on at this point) but you justify spending the time because 'it's just going to take a couple of hours or an evening'. In a word you think it will be 'easy'.

You are wrong. Make sure that anything you set out to do you think is important enough to work on even if it becomes difficult...because it WILL become difficult.

And when you're finished with it – go ahead and do the only thing that actually is easy...

*Keep reading at [awesomeinc.org/blog](http://awesomeinc.org/blog)*



3

be A FRIEND



## RULE #40

*Game will recognize game.*

## TESTIMONIALS

On our quest to define the Awesome Inc culture, we asked the entrepreneurs, mentors, and Team Alpha members what they thought the Awesome Inc culture was and what it meant to them. Each response was different from the last, with each shedding a little more light on the inner workings of Awesome Inc. The following are the unedited responses of those involved in Awesome Inc, giving you an inside look at what exactly the Awesome Inc Culture is to us.



## Kevin Mansur

Director of Strategic Relationships

When I was first introduced to Awesome Inc and a lot of the Awesome Inc Team, I was a bit confused about what Awesome Inc (as an organization) actually did. How was everyone on the team filling their time every day? The one thing I knew for certain was everyone who has ever worked or is currently working at Awesome Inc loved going to work every day.

After building deeper relationships with the team and learning more about Awesome Inc, I began to understand the mission and purpose behind Awesome Inc. The resources and community being showcased to entrepreneurs and creatives in our state are simply unparalleled. Awesome Inc's 4 Core Values: Be Good, Be Excellent, Be a Friend, and Be You are NOT just pretty posters on the wall. These values are ingrained in everything, and I truly mean everything. These values and the different initiatives have allowed so many people from different backgrounds to pursue their definition of awesome. Looking from the outside for a few years, I knew Awesome Inc was a place I wanted to be.

Joining the team has allowed me to grow in ways I could not have seen by staying in my corporate job. Creativity, innovation, solving problems, and making my role my own have been some of the greatest experiences I've had in a working environment. The support I feel from the team and our ability to work so well together is rare to find. I can honestly say I get to work with some of my closest friends every day. Although I had a unique journey getting to be in a position to work for Awesome Inc, I would do it all again. I love the team and I love being part of an organization that's mission is to make Kentucky a better place to live and work."



## Alex Webb

Team Alpha

Awesome Inc is crucial to the growth of Lexington and has benefited the city in many ways. The company is a driving force in Lexington entrepreneurship. Awesome Inc allows companies to grow, and being involved at Awesome Inc helps an individual grow as a person and a professional.



## Conner Jones

Director of Workspace

During my time here with Awesome Inc, I have experienced values that I have never seen in any corporate office. Once you enter in to the Awesome Inc community, and you accept the mission to make Lexington a better place to live and work, you realize that there's no other place you would rather be. The level of success that Awesome Inc has is a testament that their philosophy of 'Work Hard, Play Hard' produces results. Other companies take themselves too seriously, and often times that is to the demise of their productivity. Maybe the employees aren't motivated because they don't appreciate or respect their bosses, or maybe they don't feel like they bring value to the company so they don't give their best effort. So many people in the workforce clock in, clock out, and wait longingly for the weekend, but at Awesome Inc the employees truly feel inspired to work and to do their jobs at an excellent level. I can honestly say that I feel the same way and that I feel so energized walking in to the office every day to boost the tech and entrepreneurial community of Lexington. I can attribute this motivation to the way that the people at Awesome Inc have made me feel like family. This has made it so I'm not just working for my boss, but I'm working for a friend who I know cares about my wellbeing and quality of life.

I came to Awesome Inc in the wake of pursuing a graduate degree in education. I was substitute teaching during my studies and quickly learned that the school system did not provide the type of community I was looking for in a career. The people I work alongside is one of the most important things I value in what I do because, well, they are the people I spend every day with. In 9 months of working here at Awesome Inc at the time that I'm writing this, I have made friends for life and for that to be with coworkers is something I believe to be truly special.



## Camden Sloss

Director of Marketing

Awesome Inc isn't just a place I go to work... it's a place I go to be with my family and friends; they also just so happen to be my coworkers. Our four Core Values create a culture and environment that brings in good people that do good work. It's a culture that allows me to be myself. Whether I'm wearing an outfit that nobody else in the office would wear or approaching a problem in a unique way, I feel encouraged to do so in this place.

Culture at Awesome Inc both challenges and comforts, works hard and plays hard, and celebrates both failure and success. There's no other place I'd rather be to grow as a person and as a professional.



## Jacqueline Benson

Creative Director, Design Team Manager

You won't find a place that walks the talk more than Awesome Inc. I've met some of the best people in my life, experienced more things than I can count, and become a better person through my time here. We work hard and play hard in every aspect and it's a portion of my life I'll always be grateful for, for however long it lasts.



## Garrett Fahrbach

Director of Fellowship Program and Outreach and Student Engagement

Awesome Inc was one of the biggest blessings for my formative post-college, early 20s. I was offered a job by Brian via email the night I got told "NO" by my 'supposedly' safe corporate-like job.

Being in a self-starter, give before you get, "the buck stops with you" environment helped me realize that you can only succeed and go far by serving and helping those around you win.

I've had lots of friends give up on their dreams or long-term goals in their mid-20s or others do very well in the corporate environment, however, express their lack of purpose or vision or how they hated their job... which is how they spend most of their time.



## Mike Hilton

Former Director of Innovation Incubated

At Awesome Inc, the culture permeates every corner of the team, the audience, and the programming. Based on the inherent belief that all people are capable of awesome things, the culture is built around bringing those awesome things to life. People readily collaborate and serve one another, including holding them accountable to creating excellence. It's unlike any culture I've ever seen, and that foundation is invaluable.



## Amanda Murray

APAX Senior Account Director

Awesome Inc is so much more than a job, internship, co-working space, coding school, accelerator, etc. – it is a lifestyle. The founders established a set of quality core values which shapes the center of the Awesome Inc culture, providing principles that can be used as a compass for day-to-day actions. The atmosphere is open and comfortable, and you are truly free to be yourself, no matter how weird that may be. It's no surprise that Awesome Inc attracts the best and brightest. Hard work is valued and rewarded while work-life balance is encouraged. A word of advice: be prepared to bring your A-Game at all times. Awesome Inc will challenge and motivate you to become the very best version of yourself, just one of the many perks of getting to work with top-tier talent.



## Ian Rios

Former Bootcamp Assistant Instructor

Awesome Inc has helped me grow in ways that I never even thought would be possible. From learning new skills as a software engineer to developing new abilities as a teacher through Awesome Inc U, I have acquired new passions, diversified my career, and met many wonderful people that inspire me on a daily basis.

The people. Oh, I could write pages about the genuinely-good-to-the-core people at Awesome Inc, but I won't. Spend a small amount of time with the team and you'll understand. In fact, you'll likely feel like you've known them for years. In short, my days spent at Awesome Inc are fulfilling. I find our work to be meaningful and significant, and appreciate that we pursue causes that contribute to the common good and development of our community. Awesome Inc provides me the unique opportunity to grow personally and professionally while working alongside people I like and respect, and for that, I am forever grateful.



## Ioan Ozarchevici

Fellowship Team, Pawn Metrics

Their approach is unique because they really start with the founders. Aside from all of the other perks that come with the Fellowship, they've helped our business by encouraging us to grow as individuals and put passion into what we do.



## Emily Wehrle

Director of Operations

Awesome Inc is a place where someone can come not only to grow professionally but personally. It's imperative that we aren't settling to stay the same day in and day out. Challenging yourself to be a better version than the day before can be a daunting task on your own. But it doesn't need to be done alone. In fact, we weren't created to do it alone. Having a community that cares about you and wants you to thrive in your business endeavors and as a person, family member and friend is hard to come by. But it is out there and I've found it at Awesome Inc.



## Peter Briggs

Former Awesome Inc Videographer, Team Alpha

"You work at a tattoo parlor?" is the response I most often get when people ask me about my job. I usually chuckle, and then subsequently blow their minds explaining why Awesome Inc is so awesome. I guess I could brag about the endless double stuffers, the ping-pong games, the nerf wars, the mac n' cheese, the caving trips, the wacky olympics, the 3d printer - but that still would fall short of showing someone the true nature of this community. No matter how many oreos you eat, you'll only be able to enjoy what you're doing if you're surrounded by people to share those moments with - people who will listen to your ideas, talk with you about relationships, challenge what you say in pursuit of truth, encourage you to hit your goals, build you up when you fail, take you down a notch when you get big headed. It doesn't matter how old you are, your experience, your height, skin tone, weight, gender - Awesome Inc is a place everyone can pursue their definition of Awesome, and it has greatly shaped me personally and professionally. Also, it's nice to beat Kyle in ping-pong.



## Brittany Durham

Former Graphic Designer

When I first came to Awesome Inc, one of the strangest things for me to get used to was that everyone cared about me and how I was doing. Everyone here gives 100% all of the time, and they are genuinely happy to do their jobs. Do you know how much better that makes a work day, when everyone loves their job, and you get to be around those people all day? I often lose track of time during a work day, and suddenly it's time to go home. It's an incredible work environment that encourages productivity by constant positive peer pressure and accountability. I have so much appreciation for the Awesome Inc culture, and how it has helped me grow - not just as a designer, but as a person. People ask me to describe what it's like at Awesome Inc - my usual response is, "You kind of have to experience it to know what it's like. They're just good people."



## Kyle Raney

Director of Youth Education at Awesome Inc U, Development Team Manager

The culture around Awesome Inc is great at emphasizing what they're all about: Making Lexington more awesome. Lexington's entrepreneurial community would not be where it is without Awesome Inc and all of the different avenues they expand awareness.



## Keith Kurzendoerfer

Former APAX President

The Awesome Inc culture is very important to me, and has been one of the main reasons that I look forward to work everyday. The culture allows each person to work freely in whatever manner he/she finds most productive.



## "Cool" Storrs

Team Alpha

What is Awesome Inc culture? For me, the Awesome Inc culture is opportunity. Creativity and flexibility to pursue your own definition of awesome. The space and the people to enable you to not just dream it, but do it. It's the written (and unwritten) rules that are rules to live by in every situation. It is the camaraderie between Team Alpha members, whether they bond over a tough project or an intense game of ping pong. Awesome Inc culture is not something you can explain, it's something that has to be experienced. All I know is that since my time at Awesome Inc, I've matured ten-fold, my business/technical/light bulb changing/ping pong skills have improved eighty-fold, and I've only been here a few months. There is no doubt Awesome Inc has been and will continue to be a huge influence in every corner of my life. Words to live by - Always do something awesome over something not awesome.



## Grant Weherley

Fellowship Team, Control my ADHD

Awesome Inc has provided tremendous support and guidance through the Fellowship Program. Becoming an entrepreneur is a difficult process, and if it weren't for this support my company would not be where it is today, and I would not be where I am today as an entrepreneur. I have no doubt that the Awesome Inc Fellowship will continue to help build Kentucky entrepreneurs year after year.



## Dr. Scott Black

Fellowship Team, Sword

Our time at Awesome Inc has helped our company in innumerable ways. Over the past three months, they pushed us to learn more about our customers and make sure that we are building a product that provides value. They've also provided us with networking opportunities so that we can build relationships with other businesses in Lexington and learn from people who understand our problems.



## Jay Hamilton

Fellowship Team, Pawn Metrics

Awesome Inc has provided our company with many resources that would otherwise be unavailable to us because of time, money or our lack of knowledge of their or our existence. The best thing about the Awesome Inc experience is the culture, which is one of teamwork and family. This culture is something I feel is lacking from the other programs that I have been exposed to by talking to other people or by reading about their experiences. I have nothing but positive things to say about Awesome Inc and am thankful that we had the opportunity to be a part of the startup program there.

Without Awesome Inc we would not be where we are today.



## Shane Howard

Fellowship Team, Custom College Recruiting

Our time at Awesome Inc has helped our company in innumerable ways. Over the past three months, they pushed us to learn more about our customers and make sure that we are building a product that provides value. They've also provided us with networking opportunities so that we can build relationships with other businesses in Lexington and learn from people who understand our problems.



## Gus Logsdon

Team Alpha

Awesome Inc, or at least what I've seen of it so far, goes way beyond its title; it's awesome, yes, but also fun, unique, even excellent. Heck! Look up "awesome" in a thesaurus and I assure you every synonym will describe the place. I've not been here long, but it's gotta be the single coolest place I've ever worked at.



## Ashley Gallaher

Team Alpha

I spent seven months at the end of last year and the beginning of this one searching for that amazing job that would fit my personality, passions, and drive, all to no avail. One desperate afternoon I googled "Company named Awesome" to see if there was anyone in the world awesome enough to name their business for exactly what it was: Awesome. Imagine my surprise and delight to find that not only did Awesome Inc exist, it was right here in Lexington, and they were looking for interns!

I knew I had found my people, the ones I'd been searching out for so long. I've only been with Awesome Inc for a few months now, but every single person I've met and worked with has been absolutely amazing. Awesome Inc brings together spirit and drive and creativity and integrity and passion and innovation into one big awesome ball of cool people that all have the power to change the world. It inspires me to do and become every awesome thing that the rest of the world has always said was crazy and impossible. I love Awesome Inc and feel so lucky to have found a place where I can truly belong.



## David Booth

Team Alpha

The Awesome Inc culture is special. It's a culture that inspires innovation, promotes creativity, and encourages personal-growth. I feel inspired each time I enter the Awesome Inc building. But it's not because of the physical space (although it is amazing!), it's because of the people within the space. Everyone is always energetic and passionate about what they're working on. No one settles for mediocrity. I feel challenged each day to become a better person. It feels great to look back and see how much I have changed since joining Awesome Inc. For that, I am truly grateful!



## Melanie Stoeckle

Former Team Alpha, Assistant Director, APAX UX/UI Designer

I wrote a testimonial back in 2013 for an older version of this culture book that ended with "I knew before I even started interning here that I wouldn't want to leave this place." Well here we are seven years later, and I am still here. I have been involved with just about every aspect of Awesome Inc in some way over the years, and these guys have helped support my dreams and goals in life and work since day one, and that is true more than ever today. There is something about Awesome Inc's culture and that is indescribable but almost tangible at the same time, and that comes from the people and the energy that everyone puts out when we come together. We love what we do here and are always working to push the mission and company forward. The founders have built an incredible community and culture here, and it attracts other extremely talented and driven people. We work hard and we play hard. And everyone here helps to support you with your dreams and your definition of "Awesome". Even though I'm not physically in Lexington often, it's one of the best feelings for me each time I come back to always have a home (sometimes literally) at 348 E Main St and this great community ready to welcome me back.



## Theresa Simcic

Former Fellowship Director

To me, Awesome Inc is a group of people willing to take a chance on others when most everyone has overlooked or doubted them. They are a group of people that aren't afraid to challenge others, knowing that it will bring out the best in one another. They expect excellence and results from everyone, yet recognize that failure is a step forward in that process. The combination is a culture that promotes both professional and personal growth.



## Ben Kuchera

Blueprint Saint

We've been working on creating a revolutionary comic magazine for over four years now called "Blueprint Saints Magazine". It's been a chore, and as with doing anything new, we've had major challenges. We started this project without Awesome Inc and their strong arm behind us. At a make or break point, Awesome Inc came in with their explanation of what they do for startups. Had Luke Murray and Brian Raney not come in with their offer help as the bridge in the middle of the impossible, we would not have survived as an organization.

We noticed that within two months of being part of their vision of community, intellectual and creative support, our own community of 124 designers had found a home. We were able to meet together, have the technology available to make the experience unique and effective, and restart into our second act of production. Our magazine is now utterly thriving. I am forever grateful to Luke and Brian and the team at Awesome Inc. Their relentless pursuit of helping others pull off the "impossible", or "Awesome" as they would put it, has given so many a chance to do things that our city, state and nation have never seen. Because of them, awesome new things will see the light of day.

I personally am a graduate from CalArts, what is considered the best film/Art school in the world. I also continued in the New Media masters studies at the University of Cincinnati in the world first electronic media program. I have lived in L.A., Chicago, Minneapolis, and have worked with animators and digital technicians from New York, to Miami and Seattle. Through all of those creative environments, I have never seen something grow so fast and be so effective in the creative business market as Awesome Inc I personally believe in the structure and vision of Awesome inc, and, as stated, they are to credit for bringing people into the very best creative environment I have seen in the country. That's worth saying twice, because it rarely happens well even once. They are blessing our city and its people.



## Michael Lewis

Team Alpha, Founder of Business U

I joined Team Alpha in late 2014 and the first thing I noticed about the Awesome Inc community is their commitment to helping young people set and reach goals. Awesome Inc was an important catalyst in my decision to run with my startup idea and start a company. I am a better person because of Awesome Inc and Lexington is a certainty a better community. It is my hope that more students life myself will be positively influenced by the core values and generous community Awesome Inc lives out every day.



## Jarod Thornton

Awesome Inc Coworking Member

I haven't been here long - but the culture will keep me around. I appreciate the diversity in personality types, and relaxed organizational culture. Moving my business into Awesome Spaces allowed me to take making business part of my lifestyle to the next level.

I was with ATT/Cingular during their merger, and part of the CWA Union. This accounts for all my experience in the corporate world, but I remember what it was like. Everything was linear and the ladder was high into the ceilings, it wasn't for me. Having access to the co-working environment allows me to be in a structured environment to perform work tasks, but it's on my time, and I can listen to my headphones. :) I feel like Awesome Inc lets me strive alongside others while we move and shake in Lexington. I genuinely appreciate the people I have met so far, and look forward to seeing a lot of success come from the Awesomeness at 348 Main St.



## Amy Duncan

Former Director of Good

I work at a place that is set apart in a way that inspires and motivates everyone that spends time at 348 E Main St. The Awesome Inc culture to me is all about the mission statement: We do best the things that we love to do. And what we do here is innovate. My idea of the working world has been completely transformed as a result of my time spent at Awesome Inc. Awesome Inc's founders have set high standards and are following them as some of the best leaders I have ever met. They are constantly making decisions, launching processes, creating systems, and empowering people to be successful. I think of each of them in this quote, "Making others successful, and choosing to do it without expecting any recognition, is a surefire way to purify your service motives. Don't be fooled into thinking servant leadership is about the job, the title, or the amount of the paycheck. Servant leadership is about the heart." -Wayne Smith Awesome Inc really cares about people. It is a place where everyone is welcome and seen as valuable.



## **Stacy Haynes**

Team Alpha

Before I began my internship at Awesome Inc, I was given a task: create a video that explains why Awesome Inc is awesome. My answer took four parts: Awesome Ideas, Awesome People, Dance Floor, and Ping Pong Table. Even now, after I've been involved with Awesome Inc for several months, I think those four things convey a lot of the Awesome Inc Culture. I saw Awesome Ideas in action when I made the video for Startup Weekend. In three days alone, participants developed nine incredible ideas for startup businesses. I met Awesome People at my first Team Alpha outing, in which we played the Mafia game and wrote thank you notes to supporters of Awesome Inc. Along with being generally fun and interesting people, everyone at Awesome Inc seems to sincerely want to improve the world in some way. Initially, I thought that it was really cool that Awesome Inc has a dance floor. I now realize that it is even cooler, as it is used for a startup business, numerous events, and community activities. And then there is the ping pong table, which I am staying away from to avoid any further embarrassment, as everyone at Awesome Inc is somehow unnaturally good at the game.



## **Tyler Green**

Team Alpha

The Awesome Inc culture combines extreme productivity with a laid-back atmosphere aimed at having a good time. There is no sign of an employee hierarchy. Everybody performs tasks for everybody else. There will always be time for a game of ping-pong because all employees care so much about the company that it will not stop them from finishing their jobs in due time. Mutual value for the company grows because everyone enjoys their job and the people who work there. The Awesome Inc culture is truly unique and something that I would not trade for anything.



## **Leslie Guttman**

Awesome Inc Coworking Member, Writer

Awesome Inc is a great co-working environment full of nice, smart, creative, and entrepreneurial people.



## **Julia Babbage**

Team Alpha

The culture at Awesome Inc isn't something you can explain in a word document. It sounds unreal. To truly understand it, you have to experience it because there is nothing quite like it. From the moment you walk in the building, can feel a invigorating positive energy and this sort of automatic comfort in a chill environment.

It's a place where ideas are bursting to life, created and exchanged freely and willingly among various members. Just walking through the space is enough to inspire a creative thought. Walls are filled with pictures of past and present entrepreneurs, successful and renowned for their contribution to society. People here seem to be aspiring to get their photo on that wall. And I feel like Awesome Inc is step one in that process, maybe the only step a person needs to take.

The coolest thing to me about Awesome Inc is that the sky is the limit. It sounds cliche, but nothing is impossible- no one says "no." If you can think of it, you can do it. How? With the help of a team of made up of a little bit of everything-- the outrageously talented tech-savvy, some out-of-the-box thinkers, a few handy men, people who have a knack for marketing, problem solvers, the right-brained, the dreamers... working together, they create and collaborate to complete projects/ideas/business propositions/anything.

When I began at Awesome Inc, I wasn't even sure the guys who began it knew exactly what it was. I was just grateful for the push I needed in making a project that I had been thinking about for a long time possible. The best way I know how to describe Awesome is that it is exactly what a community needs- people getting together with ideas in mind and the guidance, assistance, and team they need to make them a reality.



## **Tyler Culver**

Team Alpha

What it means to be Awesome at Awesome Inc: Awesome Inc is an environment where I've been able to great things! Being a part of the Awesome family has provided me the skills to accomplish wonderful opportunities to the Lexington community. I have been able to provide a fun and enjoyable space to hang art. Awesome Inc is now a place where local artists are able to hang their work and everyone in Lexington can come and enjoy it. Without Awesome Inc and the wonderful people there I would never be able to experience this joy.



## Matt Boyer

Team Alpha

The Awesome Inc culture to me is opportunity. When I came along, I couldn't get a chance to do anything, nobody wanted to risk hiring or working with someone with "no experience" or take the time to help them learn or even teach them something. I was caught in that circle of not being able to get experience because I had none. And in today's workforce, if you're not ready-made, you're not getting hired. Actually being able to do work that I can put on a resume is going to open up a lot of things for me, not to mention my recent realization of working for myself and I'm sure I can get help starting that while here also.



## David McGee

Team Alpha

Awesome Inc is a meeting place of great people. I would not have met Luke, Brian, Nick, Team Alpha, Randall S, Scott J, Sam S, Brendan L, Noah K, Jon M, Henry B, Chuck Y and many others in the last six months if I hadn't been here. The conversations, spawned after meeting said people, have been nothing short of spectacular.

Awesome Inc is a place of opportunity. I would not have been exposed to MobileX, Lexington Venture Club, Creative Cities Summit, 5Across, Awesome Labs, Caving in Berea, Broken City Labs, Startup Weekend and many more experiences if I had not been here.

Awesome Inc means pursuing your own vision of what is awesome. I hadn't fully taken in the big picture on this until Luke did 'the thing' at "Now What, Lexington?" back in April. When everyone pursues their own vision of what is awesome, we get a society, a culture, of awesome visions. When everyone leaves that to someone else, that vision of awesome becomes very fragile. Conventional wisdom might tell you that all the visions should be combined into one, but many competing visions constantly being tested and refined are where greatness emerges.

Awesome Inc's core values are centered around being the Technology, Creative, Startup and Community hub for Lexington and beyond. I think that much of the what the core values actually are remain unwritten, which is not bad for a such a young organization with giant things ahead and not in the past. (I hope the culture book speeds that evolution towards finding the core directives.)



## Evan Blanford

Team Alpha

The Awesome Inc culture to me is very unique. The culture here is a combination of inspirational/motivated individuals and a relaxed environment. The Awesome Inc culture truly makes anything possible. While technology is the focus here at Awesome Inc, nothing is beyond reach.



## Goose Goshorn

Team Alpha

So the Awesome Inc culture, I have to say it is unlike any other that I have come across in real life. I have seen other places with similar culture, but that was on a documentary about the top 50 places to work in the USA. Now I don't mean to say that Awesome is on that sort of level, at least not yet. The culture is what drew me to Awesome in the first place. I love when things are left up to their own happenings. The structure of Awesome Inc is there and active but it is not limiting but building. There is so much going on here in so many directions and at times it is hard to wrap your head around it and you almost think there is no way that anything can be getting done. That is the wild thing, there is a ton of stuff that gets done here because of this looseness the structure. Ideas get bumped around and everyone here is coming from all different backgrounds and are all involved in their own projects but everyone here will do whatever it takes to help their neighbor make it to the next level. I feel that Awesome has some of the most potential of business/organization in the state and soon could take on some of the major power houses in the country. I feel that soon things are going to start getting REAL around here. So fasten your seat belt cause it's going to be a wild ride.



## Rusty Leskiv

Team Alpha

Awesome Inc has a very laid back feel to it but still emphasizes getting things done and thinking big. Awesome has a friendly atmosphere and friendly people, all working on something awesome. How awesome is that?



## Garrett Ebel

Former Director of Daily Activity, Team Alpha

Awesome Inc saved my life. Over dramatized? Maybe. But without the support of the Awesome Inc community, my life would not be mine own. I would be confined to the invisible cell of a steady paycheck, working to pursue someone else's dream and not my own. Would my future be secure? Maybe. I would have more cash saved up, better health benefits, and maybe even a 401K. But my security would a byproduct of taking the easy way out. Instead, I am riding a roller coaster of emotion with peaks and valleys so steep that I am forced to calm my nerves each morning I wake up or risk pissing myself. This is how life is suppose to be. We are suppose to struggle, we are suppose to create, we are suppose to be Awesome. Thank you to Brian, Luke, Nate, Nick, Rachel and all the other "founders" of Awesome Inc who have made my life more awesome. I love you all.



## Susannah Sizemore

Former Director of Good

A fellow Awesome Inc-er said it best when he described Awesome Inc as a place where ideas-- through hard work, discipline, and goal orientation, are molded into reality. Ideas don't just happen, they are persistently cultivated, worked, and re-worked into a hopeful model. Once somewhat presentable, they transition from the protected realm of the personal-- the intimate, the safe, the genius--to the public realm. At some point, ideas are tossed mercilessly out into the atmosphere where they are shaped further by elements of culture, technology, trends, convenience, finances, opinion, and criticism, only to be roped back in to the private realm, filtered and re-filtered again. Awesome Inc helps the entrepreneur mediate and persist through this often complex process. I've also heard Awesome Inc described as a "Happy Orphanage" and I am equally in agreement with this statement.



## Therese Henrickson

Former Director of Daily Activity

What is the Awesome Inc culture? The one thing that stands out most in my mind is that people enjoy coming here. Everyone enjoys coming here. That's not something I think, that's something I know. I have three examples to prove it. 1 - Individuals who were once part of Awesome Inc are frequently dropping by to see how Awesome Inc and the people of Awesome Inc are doing. This shows that they either truly care about the success of Awesome Inc or they miss Awesome Inc, or both. 2 - Majority of the people who accomplish things for Awesome Inc do not get any money for doing so, they get experience and satisfaction. Usually these individuals don't just do one or two things, but numerous/various things for Awesome Inc. 3 - I have only heard positive, great things about Awesome Inc and what it does. I am here practically all day, everyday, and am only surrounded by happy people. Though I just listed examples of other people, I also enjoy coming here. It's a great feeling to love going to work everyday. It makes waking up in the morning easier to do. Awesome Inc provides everyone the opportunity to love going to work. Awesome allows entrepreneurs a place to start the company that they dream to start. Awesome also allows students and recent grads to follow their dreams and start pursuing their true idea of awesomeness. I put my whole heart into the success of Awesome Inc and would love to see it succeed to what I know it can be.



## Luke Murray

Co-Founder of Awesome Inc

Awesome Inc Culture is about owning your life and not settling. This means owning the bad parts of it and the good parts of it....all of it is your responsibility to mold into what you want to become, to not shoot for less than what you think will be the "best" outcome or experience for you...your definition of "Awesome"...and to make the most of every step in that process. We want to create the environment where this is expected, and where it makes this very scary process as easy and natural as possible. This is what we mean when we say that we are about "facilitating the pursuit of Awesomeness."

When I do "the thing" I imagine lots of different "happy endings" - businesses starting, new Awesome Spaces popping up, seeing Team Alpha initiated projects come to their completion, creating cultural norms that truly are different from what currently exists in the world in which the people of my generation live. Sometimes I get so overwhelmed by my imagined experience of the results that I cry...seriously. But the reason I do so is not because the event itself is so moving (i.e. "pitch day", doing public, cutting the ribbon on the 100th Awesome Space, seeing the Entrepreneur Hall of Fame go up, or Nextington 50, etc.), it's the deep understanding of the courage, hard work, and the facing of fears that must happen beyond not only my abilities, but beyond the abilities of the hundreds of people that will ultimately be necessary to pull it off. It's about the drastic transformation of lives for their own good that will take place over months and years in order for these events to come to pass, and the richness they will provide not only to each individual person's life, but to the lives of those they care about and that the project, company, or community itself will affect. The cumulative effect of that process in people's lives (not just its ceremonial culmination) is what moves me to tears when I do "the thing." Said simply - it really is about the process.

We have the rules, and #3, and the secret handshake, and the song, and the other song, and that one song, but the real thrust of these things is that it's totally okay to be different, be silly, be yourself, and you should embrace your "silliness." Do YOUR thing. People that do so are the ones that break new cultural, political, social, technological, creative, and entrepreneurial ground.

Because ultimately that's what we're doing - consciously creating a culture where self-expression, specifically self-expressed desires to do things that have no moral implications but are highly stigmatized as culturally different, and so therefore implicitly discouraged, is accepted. There will be plenty more silly dances, secret handshakes, code words, and other awesomeness that will be created in the years to come.



## Nathan Fort

Co-Founder of Awesome Inc

Awesome Inc is bigger than the Awesome Inc Experience. It is bigger than the coworking space and the countless events and programs hosted in the space. Awesome Inc IS a community. Awesome Inc is a way of life and it is the foundation for future innovation, economic growth and prosperity of the Commonwealth and the United States.



## Kelsey Joseph

Former Director of Daily Activity

During my senior year of college I was more ambitious than most. My overwhelming course load of 12 hours, included an intense and rigorous course, called "Community 101". This is where I first met Awesome Inc founder, Brian Raney.

Those who know Brian know he has two special characteristics. The ability to organize and execute complicated secret ops, and an even greater ability to tell the story of those adventures. When I heard Brian speak for the first time, he opened the story by telling us of the time he took a girl to the top of High Bridge and proceeded to cling to life as a train passed by, just feet away from them. This is when I decided I wanted to be involved with Awesome Inc (even though I had no idea what they did, stood for, etc.) The people there were just absolutely insane and I needed to be a part of it.

A few months later, I was given an offer to be a part of this special group of people. I came to Awesome Inc in February 2013 and I was welcomed with open arms...and Double Stuff Oreos. The Awesome Inc culture is hard to describe. It is something that one must experience for themselves. For me, it means the coolest job I've ever had (out of the whole 5 positions I've held) and arguably the coolest job obtained amongst my fellow recent grad friends. The three months I've been here have been filled with innovation, creativity, problem solving and adventures. I can't wait to help build the future of Awesome Inc and all that's to come.



## Nick Such

Co-Founder of Awesome Inc

On our quest to define the Awesome Inc culture, we asked the entrepreneurs, mentors, and Team Alpha members what they thought the Awesome Inc culture was and what it meant to them. Each response was different from the last, with each shedding a little more light on the inner workings of Awesome Inc. Following are the unedited responses of everyone involved in Awesome Inc, giving you an inside look at what exactly the Awesome Inc Culture is to us.

Awesome Inc is my third alternative. When I graduated from college, I was told that I could either return for graduate school or find a job with an existing company. The problem was that I wasn't interested in another engineering degree, and the world economy was at its lowest point in a century. When I found out about Awesome Inc, I discovered that there was another option: I could create my own opportunity. Awesome Inc is about enabling people to control their own destinies, and inspiring them with the courage to pursue their own personal definition of Awesome. Awesome Inc is all about unlocking the potential in each one of us. From aspiring entrepreneurs at Startup Weekend, to Awesome Fellowship companies, to students learning to code with Awesome Inc U, what's truly "awesome" is seeing people chasing after their dreams, and having the necessary skills and support to succeed.



## Brian Raney

Co-Founder of Awesome Inc

The most important component of the Awesome Inc culture is that it allows people to do what they love.

We first started Awesome Inc as an extension of the Young Entrepreneurs of Lexington group. We wanted it to be a co-working space and an epicenter for entrepreneurial, creative, and high tech communities. It was going to be a place where those trying to launch their business or work on their various projects could come together and pursue their idea of awesome. Kind of like a think tank for high potential individuals. We even started off calling it UK Google or something like that.

In its first year, Awesome Inc turned out to be way more than just a co-working space or a place for like-minded individuals to get together or a venue for building community. It has turned into a place that inspires people to pursue their passion. It's a place where going big is encouraged, even when your chances of failure seem insurmountable. It's a place that is fun to work, yet the work rate of everyone is more intense than any office I've ever seen. The people of Awesome Inc have created a culture that walks the fine line between relaxation and severe intensity. I can walk into Awesome Inc and watch someone walk out of an important business meeting and go straight to playing a game of ping pong. And then go right back to following up on that business meeting by writing a proposal or designing a website. Tenants work until 3:00 or 4:00 am all the time. I have numerous pics of Awesome Inc on a Friday night and it is a similar feeling to a Wednesday afternoon (or maybe Wednesday afternoon feels like a Friday night). Some of my favorite stories of Awesome include:

Pete the Painter: homeless guy that helped paint Awesome Inc. He made enough money from painting Awesome Inc and Matt Hogg's house that he is no longer homeless. He is the only name that was mentioned at our ribbon cutting. He still brings up the fact that he was mentioned in front of the Mayor for doing great work in painting our break room. Pete is now a fully recovered alcoholic, rents his own apartment, and has launched his own lawn care company.

Nick Such: former UK Solar Car team president, future Stanford MBA student. Nick wouldn't have applied for Stanford had Luke not talked him into it. He hadn't considered starting his own business before finding out about Awesome Inc. He launched Awesome Labs in 2009 and took it on full time in 2010. He is in the process of heading up Awesome Inc U, a coding school that is profitable by year 2.

Team Alpha: An all star team of unpaid interns (though we'd never call them interns in public). Each of them works on their own project and contributes to the progress and culture of Awesome Inc.

Garrett Ebel: We met Garrett at Startup Weekend '09. Garrett initially joined Team Alpha. He joined the Warpt Displays touch screen business plan competition team that took 2nd place statewide. He later became a part of Awesome Touch. He is currently the Director of Daily Activity and is learning his ways in construction to start his own construction & real estate company.

I am a strong believer that you are a product of your surroundings. Your friends, your family, the books you read, the movies you watch, all these things contribute to who you are as a person. My favorite part of the culture at Awesome Inc is that when I show up at Awesome Inc, I am going to be surrounding myself with some of the best people I know.



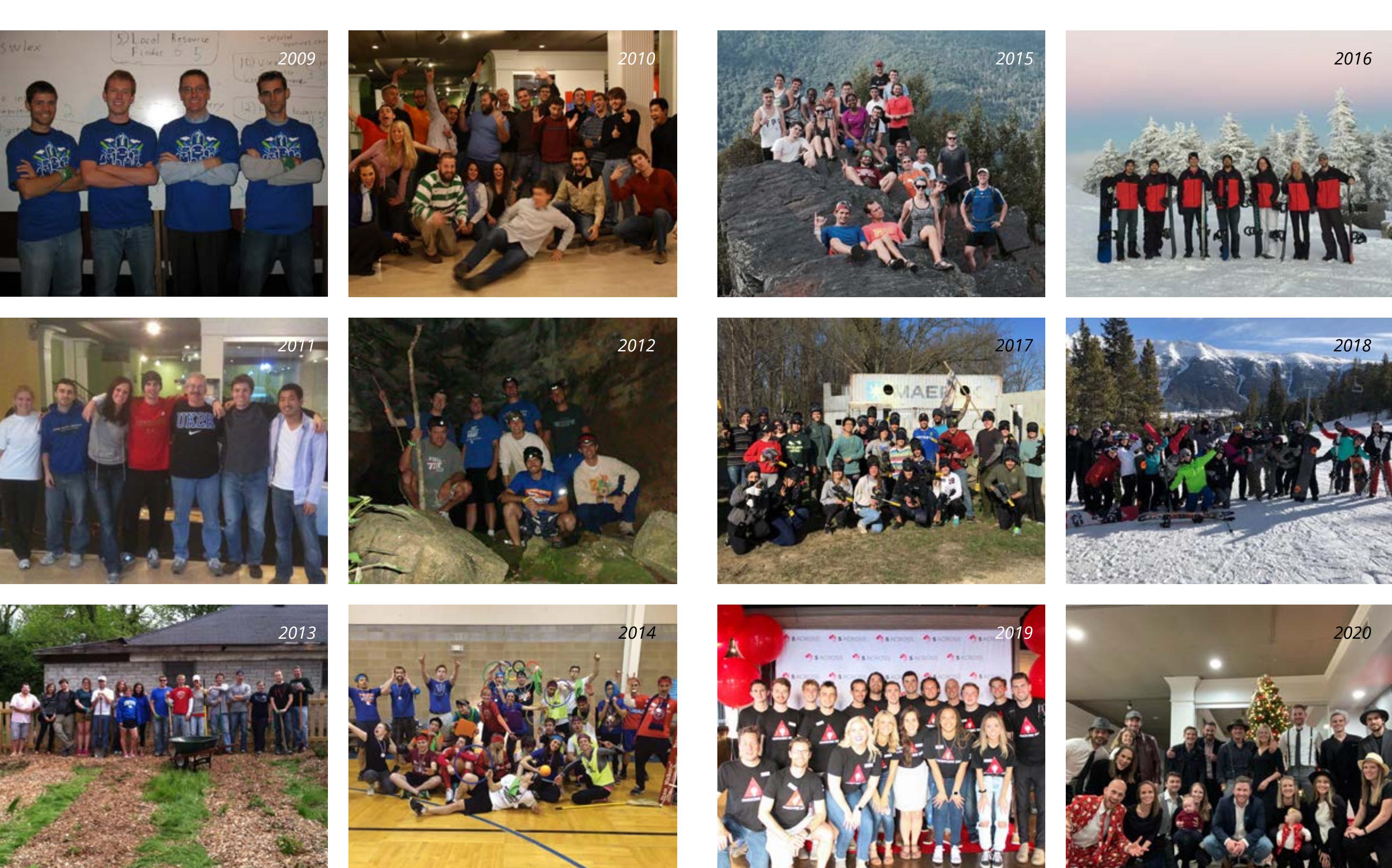
## RULE #21

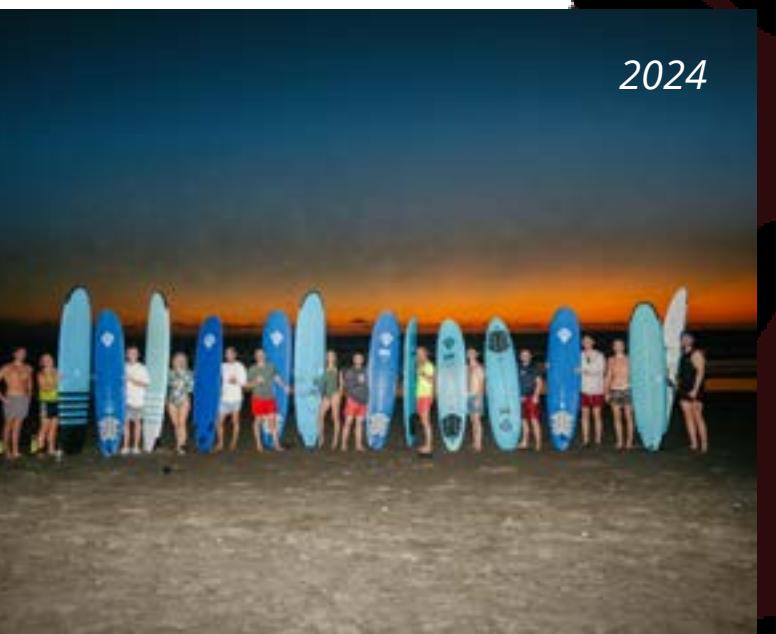
*The universal principle and indeed the purpose of life, business, sports, and all competition: Dominate.*



## HISTORY IN PHOTOS

Capturing not just fun moments, but the impact in between, we have an archive of memories from 15+ years of Awesome. Here are some snapshots from some of our favorite moments.





## RULE #26

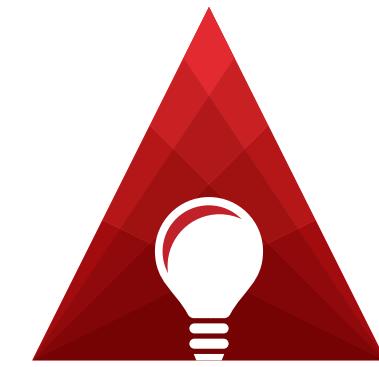
*Don't let stupid things keep you from doing awesome things.*



**CLOSING**

**What you see in this book** is just a sample of what our culture is all about. The true colors of the Awesome Inc culture is found in its people. So many people have invested a significant amount of time and made considerable sacrifices so that Awesome Inc can help others pursue their definition of AWESOME.

TO THE AWESOME INC TEAM  
TO OUR FOUNDERS  
TO TEAM ALPHA  
TO THE MEMBERS OF OUR SPACE  
TO OUR FELLOWSHIP TEAMS  
TO THE APAX SOFTWARE TEAM  
TO AWESOME INC U ALUMNI  
TO THE STARTUP COMMUNITY  
TO THE LEXINGTON COMMUNITY  
...



**THANK YOU**