

# **AWESOME INC**

START SOMETHING AWESOME

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## CULTURE BOOK V2.1

AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE GROWING CULTURE OF  
**AWESOME INC** THROUGH THE EYES OF ENTREPRENEURS  
AND TEAM MEMBERS







rule # 1

All rules are made to be bent or broken

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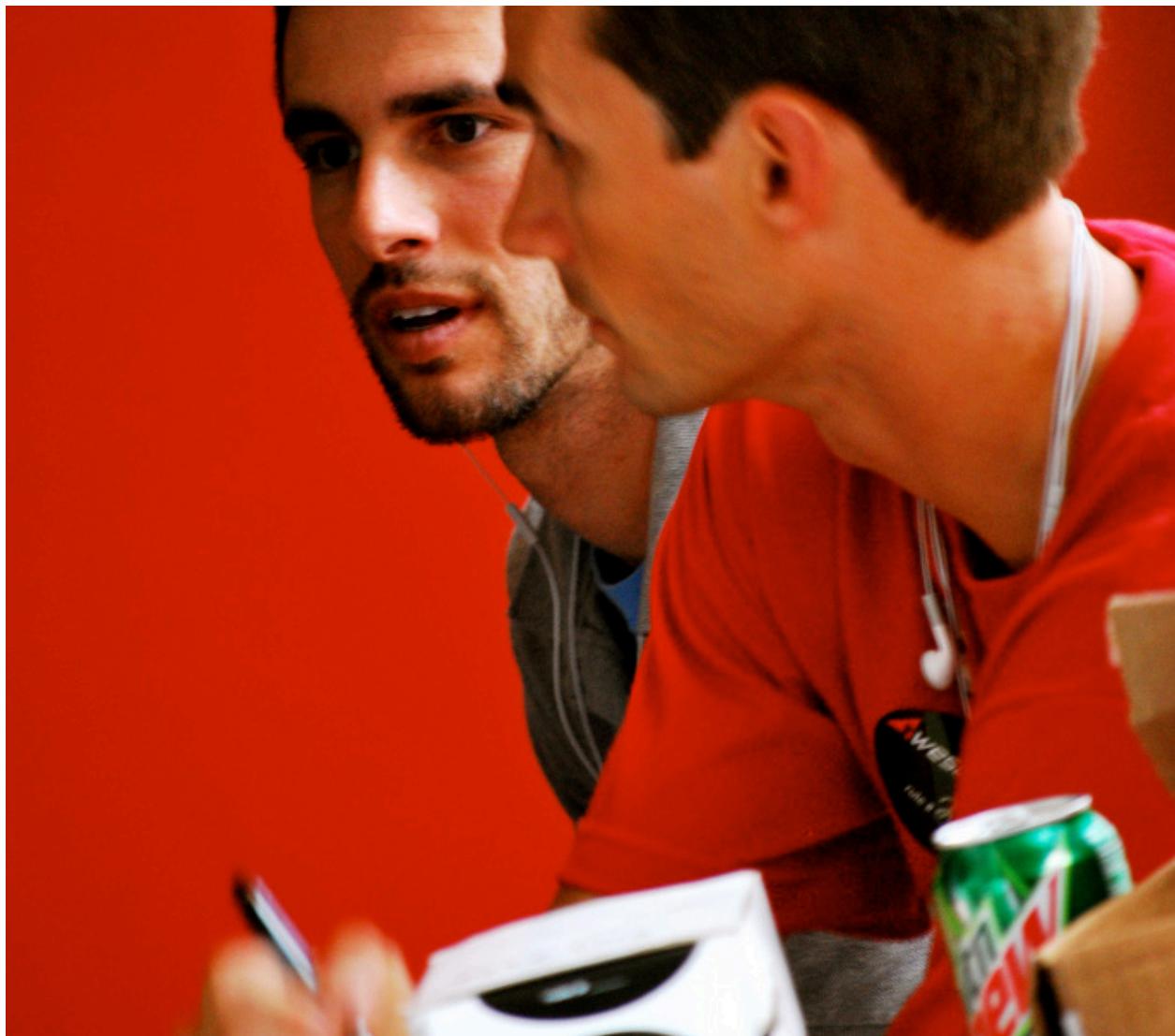
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Always do something awesome over something not awesome



Founders Luke Murray and Brian Raney

So what is Awesome Inc? Besides being awesome, Awesome Inc is an epicenter for entrepreneurship. 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 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 entrepreneurs opened the doors of Awesome Inc at 348 East Main Street in Lexington, KY.

## INTRODUCTION



Top left to right: Mark Cuban, Ashton Kutcher, Jay Knoblett  
Bottom left to right: Brad Feld, Entrepreneur Hall of Fame 2010

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 Awewome 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 Techstar 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.



Top left to right: Lou Allegra, Ralph G. Anderson, Mobile MiniConference 2009  
Bottom left to right: David Cohen, Start Up Weekend 2012

With the launch of the coworking space, Awesome Inc sought to add budding entrepreneurs and new companies to the startup community. We started out with only a few, but within 6 months we had grown to host ten great companies.

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.



# **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.

## **A job is a joy.**

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.**

This is not Work.

***This is Awesome.***



rule # 26

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

# FOUNDERS



## LUKE MURRAY

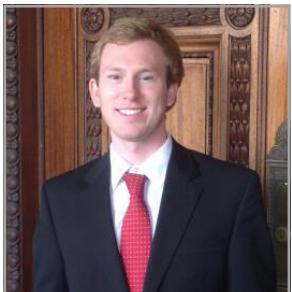
Luke got his BS from UK in the Business Administration of Medicine in 2004 and started bookexchange.com with Brian Raney that same year. He got his MBA in 2006 from UK, worked for UK hospital from 2006-2007, then Southwestern the summer of 2007 and started medical school at UK in the fall of 2007. He 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. He likes to play guitar and piano...and to talk too much sometimes.



## BRIAN RANEY

After earning a Computer Science degree from the University of Kentucky, Brian completed his Master's Degree in Economics. Brian founded his first software company, Sfenity, before graduating from college. After overseeing its merger with APAX Software, Brian served as the company's CEO through its transition from a small web design firm to a top resource for mobile app development. Brian co-founded the Young Entrepreneurs of Lexington organization in 2008, before founding Awesome Inc, a business incubator, art gallery, and technology lab in 2009. He was honored as the Lexington Young Entrepreneur of the Year in 2010. He is currently working with the BuildingLayer team, a startup that launched out of Awesome Inc.



## NATHAN FORT

Nathan co-founded Awesome Inc. in 2008 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 also enjoys riding all types of bicycles, “reading” audiobooks, 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.



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, every website, video, blog post, tweet, art piece, graphic, everything 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

## AWESOME PEOPLE



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 May, 2013:

Craig D. Usher	Shaena Neal	(aka: Green T)	Stacy Haynes
Shannon Eblen	Clay Winstead	Ranajay Sen	(aka: Cre8)
Adam Martin	Antoni Vivanco	Humberto Rodriguez	Tyler Bromagen
Sade' Webb	(aka: FIO)	Lawrence Rogers	Susannah Sizemore
Dilli Chhetri	Sophie Knight	Zack Anderson	Myles Stringer
Krishna Adhikari	Owen Wirth	Andrew Derenge	(aka: Capture)
Jachin Campbell	Kara Head	David McGee	Jake Tapia
Lisa Kindel	Sarah Detraz	Liz Stanley	(aka: Fresh)
Desny Guerrier	William Keplinger	Jessica Powers	Adam Chaffins
Lindsay Wheatley	Chase Bullock	Adam Shepherd	Kelsey Joseph
Sarah Frank	Colin Weeler	Klaine Hughes	Ashley Gallaher
Simeon Kondev	Stefan Hagfors	Phillip Habermann	Hollis Gargala
(aka: Sims)	Amy Duncan	Evan Blanford	Wayne Harden
Lauren Fleming	Sean Owsley	Ashley Biven	Tylar Culver
Julie Babbage	Andrew Hampton	Osamah Almutawa	Zackary Johnson
Matt Boyer	Samantha Verissimo	Christopher Walters	Trenton Shimizu
(aka: Thunder)	(aka: Vmo)	Josh Strange	Alex Johnson
Aaron Fons	Jordan Caldwell	Brian Raney	Melanie Stoeckle
Walker Miller	Kal Littrell	Luke Murray	Meredith Scroggin
Maddy Knoblett	Krista Osmundson	Nick Such	Theresa Simcic
Whitney Fraley	Taylor Church	Therese Henrickson	Huu Nguyen
Clay Rehmel	Lauren Janesz	(aka: Captain)	(aka: Ninja)
Hilary Perrine	Amie Huesman	Garrett Ebel	Ashley Edwards
Zach Magoto	Scott Wagner	Rusty Leskiv	Kyle Raney
Bert Berry	Oakley Peavler	Charlotte Arnold	Chris Irving
Ashley Williams	Thomas Elwood	Evan Leach	Cody James
Elise Waddell	(aka: Focus)	Sarah Hahn	Andrew Shields
(aka: Able)	Garrett Bonistalli	Amy Wolterman	
Matthew Storrs	PJ Targun	Henry Yan	
(aka: Cool)	Stephanie Gavin	(aka: Hbomb)	
Eric Prince	Matt Curtin	Clinton Noble	
Josh Deitel	Will Salmen	Jamie Pridemore	
Goose Goshorn	Landon Williams	Gordon Glenn	
Drew Trommer	Adam Dahl	Gus Logsdon	
(aka: piiiiimmmppp)	Tuan Ho	Robert Crispin	
Alexie Basil	(aka: Done)	Drew Wisdom	
Brice Harney	Tyler Green	Nate Graff	

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW



Matt Boyer: Seattle, Washington  
Software Engineer for  
AT&T



Owen Wirth: Moran, WY  
Grand Teton  
Lodge Company



Sarah Frank: San Francisco, CA  
Clearside  
Software Sales



Lawrence Rogers: Palo Alto, CA  
Stanford University



Ranajay Sen: Palo Alto, CA  
Stanford University



Krista Osmundson: Denver, CO  
Smart Cookies



Tommy Crush: Menlo Park, CA  
Developer Intern,  
Facebook



Andrew D'Amato:  
University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX

Team  
alpha

# HOW?





No excuses, play like a champion



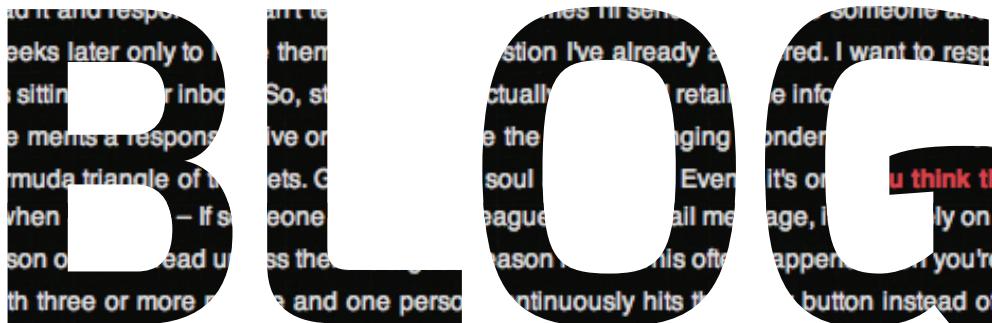
# AWESOME

# STARTUPS





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



## What matters to you most, and why?

Published August 16, 2011 Written by Nick Such

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:

I discovered that I don't need an MBA to run a company.

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.

But not so fast. Wanting some business context before I started the MBA program, I checked the little box on the application that said "2-year deferral". This meant I was accepted as of May 2009, but I wouldn't start the program until September of 2011. During those 2 years, I was expected to "work full-time to gain relevant experience." I had heard about a thing called "entrepreneurship", but didn't know what it was. So, I asked Lee Todd, the president of my university and an engineer-turned-entrepreneur, and he suggested I check out the Kentucky Science and Technology Corporation. I spent my first 6 months as an intern doing due diligence for KSTC's venture finance group. It was like candy for my brain. I got to meet a dozen new entrepreneurs every week, and spent my time researching the technology and market factors that they claimed would make their business successful. I was learning so much! But after a few months, I realized that I was sitting on the wrong side of the table. I didn't want to watch entrepreneurs, I wanted to be one.

My same friend Luke who introduced me to Stanford's MBA program also introduced me to his business incubator program, called Awesome Inc. Luke, my friend Brian, and a few others were entrepreneurs who liked helping other entrepreneurs get started. They recruited me to run this part of Awesome Inc they called Labs. It sounded really cool, but I didn't really know what it was (and neither did they). Eventually, we found out that Labs could work as a conduit between the business world and the engineering school I had just graduated from. Lots of smart kids do amazing projects, but they get shoved in a drawer at the end of the semester. We started off by working with the senior design programs, and helping students to turn their projects into products. AwesomeTouch was our first success. It was actually born out of 3 projects, one of which was the mapping technology we use today. In the beginning, we had no idea whether it would survive or not. But for the past year, it has been a little flame that we just can't snuff out. It keeps finding new fuel and growing larger.

Through this process, I realized that I didn't need an MBA to start a company. It felt like

it just kind of happened. Well, in reality, I had a lot of mentors. In the business world, mentors are like professors, except we don't even pretend that we can repay them for all the value they provide to us. Some of my mentors were personal acquaintances, while others were just random startup veterans sharing their thoughts on their blogs. But all combined to deliver a very clear message: if you want to learn how to run a business, the best way to do so is to run a business.

Even with this well-supported conclusion, my heart was set on Stanford. If the picturesque campus hadn't sold me at first glance, I would have been hooked by the location in the heart of Silicon Valley, the amazing peers I met during admit weekend, and the incredible allure for a competitive type-A like me to get to introduce myself as a graduate of the most selective MBA program in the world. However, after 2 years of planning my life around Stanford, I decided to walk away. But, most importantly, I wasn't parting on some idle whim. I had found a more attractive direction, and this one had a shelf life.

In the spring, AwesomeTouch applied to a startup accelerator program called Betaspring. After a few rounds of interviews, and rejections from other programs, we got in. Huge honor, huge surprise. I had been reading for 2 years that these "startup bootcamps" were the new alternative to MBA programs for entrepreneurs. Here was my chance to have my cake and eat it too. I planned to attend Betaspring with our team, but use it to transition myself out and head for the MBA program at the end of the summer. The problem was, I fell in love. Our enterprise touchscreen software company became an indoor wayfinding company. This all of a sudden was Human Transportation, my passion (you can read about it here). After seeing that a startup accelerator program could deliver on its promise of awesome mentors (like Ben, Sean, Brad, Angus, Josh, Charlie, and Jonathan) as well as connections to investors and customers, I realized that I had found a shortcut to all the connections that I wanted to make through the MBA program. So, if my primary reasons to go to Stanford were (1) learn how to start a business and (2) make the connections necessary for it to be successful, then I no longer had a reason to go.

The first week of August, I began throwing this idea around with Brian. I had convinced him to be my replacement as CEO of AwesomeTouch, and the transition had already begun (per our website and LinkedIn profiles). I sought some advice from other entrepreneurs, admits and GSB alumni, and they suggested I try to defer one more year. In the early stage, startups are crazy. Maybe it would be more stable in a year. I emailed the GSB's admissions staff to explain my story, and got a call back from Derrick Bolton, the admissions director. While Derrick is sometimes portrayed as the GSB's gatekeeper, my experience lends to a different theory: he's the designer. When going through the admissions process, I never felt like I was a faceless number, or a hacker trying to crack the code and break through the door. I felt like I was selected, like the missing piece of some unfinished puzzle. When Derrick called me, I asked about extending my deferral. Wisely, he suggested that I reflect

not on when I wanted to go to business school, but if I really wanted to go. The extended deferral was not an option. I reflected some more, and concluded that for my prescribed reasons, it was no longer a logical decision. In spite of how amazing the opportunity was, I knew that I must turn down my offer of admission to the GSB.

Since it prompted me to turn down Stanford, somewhere in here I should tell you about the crazy awesome stuff we're doing with AwesomeTouch. Here's the short of it: we've found a way to make giant touchscreens affordable, so more places will have our maps, and you'll never have to get lost inside an airport, hospital, shopping mall or college campus ever again. That's pretty cool. But what's more important is that we've found a scalable way to create maps for inside buildings. This may seem like a small step, but if you look at Google Maps, you'll notice that for all the outdoor roads they've collected, they don't have any maps of indoor hallways. We humans spend 80% of our time indoors, so there's a lot that Google is missing. We're calling this project BuildingLayer, and someday it's going to power the world's best indoor location-based services.

So, you might be wondering what my Stanford application essay claimed "matters to me most". My answer was my family. They have been the only constant in my nomadic life, and are consistently a source of inspiration. Both my grandfathers are entrepreneurs, and I recently learned the full story of my grandfather Jim's career choice. You see, he was a smart kid, too. He spent his whole life preparing to go to a prestigious engineering school. Just before he was to start, he realized that this degree path would train him to sit at a desk and make calculations all day long. He instead opted for the hands-on approach and became a plumber's apprentice. I, too, have chosen the hands-on approach, and I'm excited to see where it takes the family we've formed at AwesomeTouch.

PS: If you're in a similar situation (startup or b-school?), and need some additional reading, start with these:

Steve Blank – Entrepreneurial Finishing School

Vivek Wadhwa – Is an MBA a Plus or a Minus in the Startup World?

Charles Huang – The blue pill or red pill: Start-up life or an MBA?

Brian Scordato – Don't be a hippo (be yourself)

And for kicks, help Mike Moradian decide if he should go to HBS or work on CampusBudd

## Recruiting Me: Notes from an Awesome Intern

Published June 25, 2012 Written by Jamie the Intern Hits: 774



On June 19th, 2012, Awesome Inc partnered with Commerce Lexington to offer “Recruiting Awesome Interns” - a workshop geared towards those who want to learn how to recruit, select, and retain the best interns possible. I will give my own answers to some of the questions asked of the panel of Awesome Inc and Orange Leaf interns.

### What the biggest benefit you get out of your internship?

The biggest benefit I get from being a part of Team Alpha at Awesome Inc is experience.

While I watched my brother graduate college and spend 5 months looking for a job that paid more than minimum wage, eventually settling for one completely unrelated to his degree, I wondered how I could avoid a similar fate. As one who has always hated working low-wage fast food and retail jobs, I had to find a way to improve my stock as an eventual employee... So I got an internship! While I knew I would eventually have to find an internship as required by my major, I knew that the more experience I could gain before I left college, the better.

The personal and professional value I gain from developing myself, my skills and abilities, and my relationships with the people I meet will be something irreplaceable once I leave Awesome Inc (if I ever do!) due to the genuine nature of being an intern - working voluntarily, not out of necessity.

### Why did you pick the internship you picked?

I didn't pick Awesome Inc, Awesome Inc picked me. While I had heard back from other internships, I didn't feel that they were a good fit towards my personality and, in one case, heard from someone in the position I would be filling that I would not be doing any practical work.

The task I was given when I first interviewed for Awesome Inc, on the condition that I was interested in moving forward, was to manage their social media accounts in the busy week before the mobileX Lexington 2012 conference. Them entrusting their brand's name to someone they just met to me showed that they obviously had faith in my abilities, perhaps even more so than I had in my own. The trust they placed in me essentially solidified my desire to be a part of Team Alpha due to the simple fact that they made my work feel like it means something. That is enough to attract most people of above average ability – let them be an important part of something bigger than themselves. Let them be essential to you.

Yeah, that and the free pizza.

### How did you hear about Awesome Inc?

Awesome Inc does a great job of reaching all of the possible pipelines of recruiting quality talent. Upon deciding to go back to school, I learned that I would eventually be required to find an internship. This was good timing with my decision to seek one as the College of Journalism and Telecommunications at UK has a list of 180+ internships, paid and unpaid, in locations all over central Kentucky and the United States as a whole.

I, fatefully, searched from the bottom up and found Awesome Inc (who was in the first 5 that I applied for) to seem like a great fit for my wide variety of abilities and interests, especially the technology element.

### What is your role at Awesome Inc?

As stated, I was running social media accounts at first. I still keep those fed. I have, however, expanded. While I originally wanted to take a more marketing-based approach to my work at Awesome Inc, learning the magic behind advertising, pitching, etc., I was offered a few projects which coincided with other skills I had.

I've got a lot of random communicative and technical skills that I picked up in my technological upbringing... and I use them. In short: I bridge many of the teams. My presence is most strongly noted on the web, blog (much of my work is behind-the-scenes) and social media

teams but I have also worked with the multimedia production team in providing creative IT solutions to coincide with Awesome Inc's small budget.

### **Why do you stay at Awesome Inc?**

As previously expressed, I am here for the experience. I can get experience anywhere, though. Aside from the experience, the people, the culture and the work that I am given the opportunity and privilege to do are what keep me around.

Awesome Inc is home to some of central Kentucky's best, brightest and most creative. On top of that, they're very friendly, open and accepting. While I can be a tad eccentric, even weird, I've found a friend in my fellow Team Alpha members as well as the founders of Awesome Inc. Watching Brian, Luke, Therese, Nick and all of Team Alpha work inspires me to work harder and embrace Awesome Inc Core Value #2: be excellent.

### **Why did you accept a non-paid internship?**

Who are you kidding? Awesome Inc pays me in parking, experience, free food (including Rebecca of Premiere Dance's AWESOME brownies) and great friendships.

I'd rather do work that I love for free than do busy work that I am not passionate about for pay. Awesome Inc offered me the opportunity to do just that and that exceeded all other offers and opportunities I have had since joining. The pay is in the freedom, trust and excellence that I am given the privilege to place in my work.

### **What is your goal after your internship?**

Ideally, I'd like to leave Kentucky for a while. While Awesome Inc has made my time much more enjoyable, I want to see what the world has to offer. I've traveled a lot and can see myself settling down to do marketing or even social media management (apparently I'm really good at it!) in the Midwest or perhaps the Pacific Northwest. I'm confident that much that I've learned through Awesome Inc will be of use to me in the future, be it developed "people skills", ping-pong domination (just kidding, I've yet to beat Nick. Darn!), technical skills or just simply the greatly expanded understanding of business and economics in general.

### **Anything else?**

I'd really like to thank Commerce Lexington, Brian, Therese and all of the panel and audience from the workshop. You guys were great! Also, thanks to everyone at Awesome Inc for being Core Values 1 through 4.

## Forget em...do your thing!

Published September 8, 2010 Written by Brian Raney Hits: 707



PHOTO: ART STREIDER

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. Their plan idea, ask the 400 wealthiest people in the country to pledge 50% of their wealth to philanthropy. Warren Buffet is leading the way by donating 99% of his wealth.

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

After reading the article I parsed through the comments section. To my surprise, a significant portion of the comments were negative and bashing of Gates and Buffet. I found quotes saying “They’re just doing this for their egos” or “after doing their part to destroy the U.S. economy, they now get to make it right by giving the money they obtained by destroying other peoples lives away” or “This is feel good altruism and more harmful than helpful.” I couldn’t believe what I was reading. I wanted to personally defend them from all their critics. And then I realized, “wow...think about the amount of time that Gates and Buffet could spend responding to their critics. They could literally spend every waking moment of every single day defending themselves. Thankfully, they don’t care what their doubters think and instead spend all that time doing their thing”. Which currently appears to be changing the world through the Great Givers initiative.

My conclusions, Bill Gates has a lot of critics, a lot of haters, and a lot of people that disagree with what he is doing. But he has one ally who happens to be the richest man in the world. Game recognize game. He is also in the process of acquiring more allies that will really make a difference. He is confident and secure enough in his initiative that he ignores his critics.



PHOTO: MARK PETERSON

The lesson: you’re always going to have people that disagree with you and doubt your ideas, your abilities, and even your motives...Forget ‘em - do your thing!

## Becoming an entrepreneur. Again. And again.

*Published September 20, 2011 Written By Brian Raney*

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. It's been a roller coaster of an experience, including several instances of not only almost closing the doors of Awesome Inc, but I also nearly lost my original software company from lack of focus on it. I've spent countless nights working until 2, 3, or 4:00 am down at Awesome Inc putting sweat and tears into our passion and mission that is - to help other entrepreneurs do what they are passionate about and support themselves and the people around them. I wouldn't trade it for anything. A few of the highlights have been - launching the KY Entrepreneur HOF (hearing stories from John Y. Brown, Pearse Lyons, Dr. Todd, & Davis Marksbury), building a high tech startup culture of communities and events that include Startup Weekend, a series of mobile technology conferences that have featured speakers from Facebook, Yahoo!, PayPal, and AT&T (brands that would normally have no reason to step foot in KY), and a monthly pitch contest that gives away \$500 to the winner of each event. Most importantly, we've assisted in the launch of dozens of companies including our most successful and highest potential startup, AwesomeTouch.

This leads to another crossroads that I faced as recently as a few months ago. I had finally built Awesome Inc to a sustainable break even state (we weren't paying ourselves anything, but we could at least cover the rent and the staff it took to run it). My software company was back on track and has been profitable for 15 of the last 17 months. About this time, Nick Such and the AwesomeTouch team were starting to gain significant traction. We had three paying customers on reasonable sized contracts and a couple of very large opportunities in the healthcare space that were interested in purchasing our solution. We knew we needed some investment to take it to the next level. So we started applying to the top seed stage accelerators around the world. If you aren't familiar with a seed stage accelerator, it is kind of like grad school for entrepreneurs. It's generally a 3 month boot camp that is intended to accelerate your startup to the next inflection point, often leading to investment. Not long after applying we were accepted into a program in Providence, RI called Betaspring (read the story [here](#)).

Another decision had to be made - continue making a moderate to strong impact on Lexington with the initiatives at Awesome Inc or go all out again and potentially risk losing the foundation I'd built for the past four years. This time, the decision wasn't as difficult...I can play it safe in a couple years, right? Nick and I decided pretty quickly that we had to do this. We had to do it to excel AwesomeTouch to the level it needed to be at. We had to do it to put Awesome Inc on the national map, and we had to take the chance of winning really big for Lexington and UK to be able to point to our company as a success story that would encourage others to follow in our footsteps.

...And now we're back in Lexington. AwesomeTouch launched another company, Buildinglayer (an even more ambitious endeavor). Nick, founder of AwesomeTouch & Buildinglayer, had to decide between creating 'google maps for indoors' (the basic premise of Buildinglayer) or going to Standford to get his MBA...guess what he chose? Having the confidence, the nerve, or the naivety to think that you can create a better opportunity than the one you currently have is a huge part of being an entrepreneur. In fact, it's necessary. The question is, how often will make that decision in your life, in your company...or when the opportunity to solve a problem in the world by creating a company, comes along? My answer, I hope, is 'every time'.

## Game recognize game

Published December 2, 2011 Written by Luke Murray Hits: 1041

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. My business partner Brian's room looks like hell – but he knows where everything is and he doesn't drop balls in his personal or professional life.

This concept is really the same as the idea of just doing something. Deciding not to judge a book by its cover is like deciding to plan despite being aware of the uselessness of that plan and of the fact that just trying something out in the real world will get you there much faster. Sending a person that you think might be good at 'X' because you 'judged' them in the first 5 minutes of an interview is not a bad thing. Actually it's great because it gets them moving and doing something right away. Now you just have to look at what's working and what's not working and adjust it accordingly. If you meet someone that's dressed weird and so you assume they are creative (an assumption I make a lot) and you put them

on a project that you think requires creativity and they're terrible then ask them what they think the problem is, why it's not a good fit for them (or perhaps it would be with a slightly different environment) and then make the necessary adjustments.

Go ahead, judge a book by its cover...just make sure to open it quickly and read carefully at what it actually has to say...and trust that game will ultimately recognize game.

## How to find out what your real priorities are

*Published December 20, 2011 Written by Luke Murray Hits: 712*

When a businessman is looking at all the different things that need his attention and he then creates ‘priorities’, what distinguishes something of high priority and something of low priority on a practical level? The allocation of ‘resources’. Higher priority initiatives get more ‘resources’ than lower priority ones.

But what does the word ‘resources’ mean? Well, it can mean a lot of things, like equipment, office space, marketing budget, staffing, etc. but they all boil down to two things: time and money. The equipment, office space, and marketing budget are all just different forms of spent or allocated to be spent money. The staffing is simply man hours. So, if you see a crazy awesome billboard for a pizza shop and then drive there to see that both the outside and inside are decked out like DisneyLand and you order a pizza and it tastes worse than a Little Ceasars cheese pizza with no spice pack, then don’t let that owner tell you that his priority is ‘high quality’. He can say it all he wants, but he’s obviously put most of his time and money into the marketing and promotional aspect of his business. I’m not saying that is right or wrong – but those ARE the priorities of the business...not what it says on a plaque on the wall or what the owner tells you when you ask him.

The same thing goes with your life. If you want to know what matters to you most – look at your calendar and your bank statement. What are you spending your time and money, your ‘resources’ on? If it’s not what you want it to be, then put some new things on your calendar and make some new purchases/investments/donations. If it is, then good for you. If it’s not, though, and you don’t plan on changing anything, then consider telling people your real priorities (the ones that you spend your resources on) instead of kidding yourself and them by saying what you think they want to hear. You’ll just end up sounding like the guy with the DisneyLand pizza shop.

## Business - a reflection of personalities

Published October 18, 2011 Written by Luke Murray Hits: 653

Your business is a reflection of your personality – your strengths, weaknesses, quirks, and preferences. This sounds a bit esoteric, at least it did the first time I heard it, but the more I look at businesses the more I realize how true this is. It's true in a young small company and even in a large company. Heck, even Microsoft and Apple seem to be outward expressions of their founder's personalities.

When you walk into Awesome Inc., especially a year or so ago it screams "Brian and Luke!". There are just a bunch of enthusiastic young people doing things they like. There are several things going on at once that cover different areas of interest – from comics to touchscreens to ballet. This is how my brain works...and so this is the environment that we've created. The space has recently become much more clean and organized - something important to Therese, our Team Alpha captain and main employee - so guess what? It's much organized than it would be if only my personality were being reflected.

Now it's important to note that not only does a business get it's personality from the founders, it also inherits the founders weaknesses if they are not extremely proactive about getting people on their team to compensate for those weaknesses.

Again, look at Microsoft & Apple. Bill Gates was not particularly visually creative. I doubt he spent much if any time studying calligraphy...he was too busy coding. Steve Jobs, on the other hand (who didn't know how to code by the way), dropped in on calligraphy classes after dropping out of college. Bill Gate's dominance of the software market is indicative of his in depth understanding of it and his business acumen for it. Steve Job's appreciation for design and visual beauty are what have made Apple and its products the standard in industrial design in their fields. Actually those calligraphy classes he dropped in on ended up coming in handy when it was time to determine the spacing between letters on the modern home computer. It ended up being the standard on all personal computers.

But Gates/Microsoft is still trying to catch up with Steve/Apple in 'coolness' and aesthetic design while Apple is doing its best (and finally starting to gain significant traction) an actually owning a nontrivial size of the software market.

So realize that your personality...including your weaknesses...will come out in your business if you don't have a human being there to fill in with that as a strength. There is no piece of software or system that will make up for your own behavioral flaws so either fix them before you start, pay someone to take care of these types of tasks for you, or bring on a cofounder whose strengths complement your weaknesses.

## What I Learned in San Antonio (on the Commerce Lexington trip)

Published June 22, 2012 Written by Nick Such Hits: 469

Last week, I had the privilege to participate in Commerce Lexington's Annual Leadership visit in San Antonio, TX. Since 1974, our local chamber of commerce has been organizing these trips that bring together business, government, academic, and community leaders to travel to another city. The "visit" aspect (versus just a group meeting somewhere in Lexington) serves two purposes:

Find inspiration from other cities that are doing cool things

Bring Lexington's leaders together in a new environment, free from the distractions of home.

The Leadership Visits have been the nexus for some of Lexington's great assets, including Thursday Night Live which was inspired by a visit to Greenville, SC. On this visit, one of the highlights of San Antonio was the River Walk, now a major tourist attraction and downtown focal point, but once just a trickling stream. What not many people know is that there is a similar stream that flows under Lexington. On this trip, we learned that the Town Branch Creek is perhaps more voluminous than the creek that feeds the San Antonio River. The difference is, San Antonio chose to design a beautiful, open waterway. In Lexington, we conveniently diverted our creek through a buried pipe. For a city often described as "conservative", the notion of unearthing a buried stream and manufacturing a downtown river is nothing short of audacious. But, looking at Lexington's history, you may be surprised to learn that we have a penchant for progressive public-private partnerships. I hope we take a gamble on this.

With all the focus on the river, another key aspect of our host city was under-emphasized: young leaders are critical in shaping the city of San Antonio. In our trip program, all participants under the age of 40 were denoted as "Emerging Leaders." I commented to my friends before the trip In San Antonio, "If Mark Zuckerberg, age 28, lived in Lexington, would he be considered emerged yet?" I did notice a difference in San Antonio. People in that age range are just called LEADERS. However, that designation was objectively earned. They didn't wait for a 40th birthday party to receive permission to lead at the forefront of their city. They just went out and made it happen. The two examples with whom I'm most familiar are:

Julian Castro

Mayor of San Antonio (7th largest city in the USA)

Age 37 (Mayor since 2009, age 34)

Lanham Napier  
 CEO of Rackspace (>\$1B annual revenue)  
 Age 41 (CEO since 2006, age 35)

There are a few notable similarities about these two leaders. First, both are from Texas. They didn't have to be sold on why they should live there. Both have graduate degrees from Harvard (Castro in Law, Napier in Business). This doesn't make them inherently better leaders (heck, they even let me into HBS), but it does guarantee that they know what world-class means, and demonstrate that they aren't scared to chase after it. Also, they are in terminal positions. They can't move any higher up within their organizations, so the only way to achieve greater things is to drag the whole organization up with you. This differs from some of Lexington's young leaders who are not in terminal, but transient leadership positions. The best basketball player in Lexington will leave for the NBA. Even within the world of sports, San Antonio's professional basketball team, the Spurs, provide a terminal post, and one that is noted for its world-class leadership transitions.

I have a friend who works with Steve Westly, an advocate of rotating involvement in the 3 major sectors of society: business, government, and academia (I'd argue that religion fits in there as well). Looking at those three sectors, who are some of our young, already-emerged leaders within terminal organizations here in Lexington? I'll offer a few (this list is far from exhaustive, and is based totally on my familiarity):

#### Business

Brian Raney – CEO of Apax Software, co-founder of Awesome Inc  
 Lamar Wilson and Lafe Taylor – co-founders of 212ths and Pheeva  
 Peyton Fouts – founder of OuiBox

#### Government

Jeff Fugate and Brandi Berryman – run the Lexington Downtown Development Authority  
 Mayor Gray's staff – peppered with young folks (and his campaign staff was anchored by young professionals)

#### Academia

Matt Wilson – Geography professor at UK, helping push OpenLexington  
 Justin Bathon – Director of CASTLE, world-renowned education technology policy group

Last year, I wrote about the departure of many of Lexington's leaders. With the World Equestrian Games and other recent successes, I was worried that Lexington would go downhill following their departure. Now, I look at this in a different light. Perhaps these departing leaders had one last bit of insight: the most effective action they could take was to hand off the torch to a new generation. And while earlier I perceived the under-40

designation as a form of ageism, it's in fact a testament to the associated wisdom of Lexington's leaders. Those who recognize this gap are doing something about it. The reason that I, and many of the other young professionals, were able to attend this trip was through the generous private donations that provided Emerging Leader scholarships. Far from excluding, Lexington's current crop of leaders is actively including their younger peers. But, as the saying (rather apropos in equine land) goes, "You can lead a horse to water..."

Dear leaders of my generation: the torch is now in our hands. It's our calling to make Lexington a world-class awesome city. Let's roll.

# Why “Startup Communities” is Even Bigger Than I Realized

Published November 9, 2012 Written by Awesome Admin Hits: 154



Brad discussing Startup Communities at Awesome Inc

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."

Buy this book.

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: a core of stable employers, a continuous influx of smart people, and a sufficient mix of risk-taking individuals. It's also a really enjoyable place to live, with good food, plenty of shopping, modern electricity/water/internet infrastructure, a swath of housing options, and a variety of entertainment choices. Yesterday, as we partook in some of the excellent nightlife offerings, it might have been apropos that we began our evening in Henry Clay's Public House. Prior to becoming a statesman on the national scale, Henry Clay was not only a successful lawyer, but also an agricultural entrepreneur. Next, we moved to Lexington Beer Works, a recent addition to Lexington's bar scene, with a host of specialty and craft brews. It's no accident that this location has become one of the staple hangouts for the tech and entrepreneur crowd. Among its group of founders are veterans of Lexmark, the city's largest technology company. To conclude our evening, we grabbed a snack from Dogs for Cats, a sidewalk vendor so-named for selling specialty hot dogs to the local populace of UK Wildcat fans. We paid for this food through Square, closing the loop on our tech-startup-community-time-warp of an evening.

Brad Feld has an assertion that "we can create startup communities anywhere". There are two ways to read into this. One perspective is that we can create communities of startups (ie local groupings of early-stage technology companies). The other is to redefine how we view the general concept of "community", through the innovation-centric lens of startups. Our communities, whether they're local or virtual, official or informal, are forever imperfect and constantly changing. Yet, a core piece of human nature is an affinity for other human beings. We join together as sports teams, volunteer groups, and book clubs. We can't help but form communities. But what if we more consciously formed our communities? The innovation frameworks used by startups are applicable far beyond the creation of technology companies. What if governments a/b tested as effectively as Google? What if schools iterated as quickly as Skype? Essentially, startup methods enable human organizations to take advantage of biologically-inspired innovation processes. And biology is pretty good at innovation.

Thus, my take-away from Brad's visit is two-fold. On the surface, he provided excellent suggestions for building our community of technology company people (and reinforcement for some of the things we're already doing well). Yet, perhaps more importantly, he reminded me that what we're doing is much bigger. While companies focus on creating tangible products and delivering valuable services, the true end result is a more abstract thing known as a better life. The identities of some of the greatest innovators are often tied to their products, but the lasting impact that they have had is actually through the communities and lifestyles they created. Even in the case of Steve Jobs, it could be argued that, "Jobs's greatest creation isn't any Apple product. It is Apple itself." John Gruber's statement about Jobs includes a note about self-similar fractal design, a math reference that I'm sure Brad would enjoy. This distinction is important, so I'll be explicit: the way we build our products, should be the way we build our companies, should be the way we build our cities, should be the way we build our world. Perhaps the Boulder startup community's greatest creation isn't Storage Technology Corporation (\$4.1B acquisition), or TechStars (top accelerator program), but Boulder itself. By turning Boulder's lessons into a book, Brad has articulated a new way for creating and re-creating our cities. That's big.

If you'd like to experience the vision for Lexington that my co-founders and I share, I invite you to visit us at Awesome Inc. It's our 6000-square-foot prototype of the future of this city.

## Focus on the Hot Dog

*Published September 12, 2010 Written by Luke Murray Hits: 1208*

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 does 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.

First, the cool stuff is only skin deep and it doesn't take a very inquisitive person to see that you're just a shell. For example, simple questions like "How many customers do you have? How long have you been washing laundry? What makes your pizza different or better than any other pizza" would be fumbled and all the confidence that you (and that customer) had in your company thanks to your professional appearance would deflate faster than a popped balloon.

Second, the cool stuff is expensive. The other finite resource you have (after time) is money. You should spend as little of it as possible, and only on the things that matter most (duh). If it was your last 10 dollars (or the only 10 dollars you could possibly spend to get that pizza shop off the ground) what would you spend it on? A logo? A t-shirt? Fliers? No you'd spend it on some stinking tomatoes, cheese, and dough! Now, you might not have only 10 dollars, but if you don't spend money on the most important things first, you might soon be left with only 10 bucks, and you can't buy a whole lot of pizza making ingredients with that. So you now have to get it right the first time (and since you've never done it before, you probably won't).

Third, focusing on the important stuff gives you real confidence. Remember that confidence I talked about earlier? The kind you get by dressing up like you're a real business? Let me tell you two things about that lingering feeling of Are we actually legitimate? that you're looking for. One, it's probably not going to go away for years. My business partner has run a software business for over three years now and he still asks that question from time to time. Two, the fastest way to confidently be able to answer that question with a yes is by knowing that your company is *the best* at what you do because the best *always* stay in business. It may make you feel good to give someone a branded email address (lmurray@laundrypros.com) on a fancy business card, that directs them to a smooth website, but it doesn't feel nearly as good as it does to look the banker, the customer, the investor, the supplier in the eye and say, we've washed 375 loads of laundry with an error rate of 2% and an average turnaround time of 2.5 hours, which is twice as accurate and three times as fast as our competitors, and five times more accurate and six times better than the national average. How much are they going to care about your business card or your logo then? Be the best first. Be the prettiest second.

Fourth, and finally, statistically speaking, your business will fail. You probably won't make it past your first year and you almost definitely won't make it past your third year so because the clock is ticking, focus on answering the questions that are crucial to your survival: Do people really value having their laundry done? Can we make the best pizza in town? Is it possible to return laundry faster and with a higher degree of accuracy than our competitors? If you spend half your time during that crucial first year filing a bunch of paperwork (so your business can be legit) and thinking up cute slogans you may run out of time and money and not even know if you actually failed! It very well could be that it's possible to kick the crap out of the local pizza shop because they are lazier and less creative than you are but you spent only 20 of those 60 hours per week you spent on your business actually making pizzas!

Don't be an idiot if want to start pizza shops, laundry companies, or car detailing businesses, spend 90% of your time actually making pizzas, washing laundry, or cleaning cars *nothing else*.

This entire post presupposes that you know what your core business is. The guys from 37 signals wrote a book called Rework and one of the chapters talks about focusing on the hot dog. Using the analogy of starting a hot dog stand they talk about all the decisions that you have to make: color of the umbrella, types of condiments, type of cart, location in the city, bun varieties, etc. There's a *lot* to think about. However, if you don't have a hot dog, you don't have a hot dog stand so focus on the hot dog first and foremost.

This is simple for a pizza shop or a laundry business perhaps (unless the pizza shop is selling the most fun atmosphere, or the hottest waitresses and not necessarily the best pizza) but it might be much more difficult for other businesses. Â But knowing what your core business is - your hot dog - is the first thing you need to clarify before putting together the list of the dozens of other things you have on your mind about what needs to happen to get your idea off the ground.

## 4 Reasons Why Lee Todd is Awesome

Published September 26, 2011 Written by Luke Murray Hits: 1289



"Dude, I just had a five hour energy and then took a 20 minute nap...I'm going to shake his hand right off of his arm!" Brian and I were waiting for Dr. Todd to show up at Arby's for lunch. Awesome Labs Director, Nick Such, was on his way. We'd been wanting to meet with him since before we opened the doors of Awesome Inc, as we feel it's making the kind of differences that Dr. Todd talks about in his speeches, but for one reason or another we had yet to get to sit down with him and hear him express his personal priorities, and us ours. So in addition to my physiologically stimulated state and my naturally high-energy personality, waiting three years to sit down with someone that you've got a picture of on your wall (actually in two places - our 'Wall of Awesome' and 'The Kentucky Entrepreneur Hall of Fame'), had me ridiculously excited.

Fortunately for all parties involved, Dr. Todd's hand stayed attached to his forearm after I shook it. I was also able to sit still long enough to hear all the cool things he had done and Brian, Nick and I shared what had done and planned to accomplish with Awesome Inc. As the conversation wrapped up, though, I was even more energized than when it started, actually more so than I'd been in months and not because Dr. Todd gave us advice or insight that we'd never heard, or made an introduction for us that we needed. He made no promises and offered no favors (aside from covering our lunch - which we greatly appreciated), just his presence and attention for a little over an hour. In this post, I want to explain how that presence and attention alone lifted the spirits of three young entrepreneurs in a way it hadn't been in a long time. The short answer: he's awesome.

### 1. He cares about Awesome stuff.

Rule #4: "Always do something awesome over something not awesome."

Dr. Todd has a passion for science, technology, entrepreneurship, math, and education. He knows that building a strong foundation in these areas will make an individual more employable, and that doing it for the state of Kentucky and the US will make us more

competitive. Since he happens to be an MIT-trained engineer, entrepreneur, and educator he not only knows intellectually that everyone else should do these things, but he personally has dedicated his professional life to them, and not out of obligation. His definition of 'Awesome' throughout his life has been different manifestations of these endeavors.

Between Brian, Nick, and I, we are also scientists, engineers, educators, and entrepreneurs, and we see some of the same opportunities and potential for the students of UK and the people of this state and nation. We've also made sacrifices for and decisions about our professional futures (Brian's decision, Nick's decision, my decision) to these things as well.

Having this common foundation, not just as a hobby (we weren't talking UK basketball while blowing off jobs we didn't like) or even as a profession (Brian, Nick, and I have yet to pay ourselves and Dr. Todd could have found a much more lucrative job if he was shooting to maximize his income), but as a deep-seated calling and passion transformed the conversation from one of just energy and passionate opinions to one of purpose. When he would tell us that he 'really appreciated what we were doing' it was a thankfulness that felt better than most people that share this sentiment (which is many) not just because Dr. Todd's a big deal, but because we felt understood and validated by someone that has gone through and then so far beyond where we are.

It was also encouraging to see that his definition of Awesome was his own, not determined by anyone else. He was saying no to so many things things that weren't his priority or passion and had been for years. There are plenty of things he could have focused on both in his presidency and now that he has chosen not to. This refusal to say yes to everything has led to criticism (one of Dr. Todd's favorite qu

otes about how much 'the critic' counts) and a whole lot more progress towards what he thinks really matters than if he'd tried to make everyone happy. He's embodied the attitude of forget 'em - do your thing.

## 2. He cares about making a difference

Dr. Todd has created millions of dollars in wealth and hundreds of jobs through the companies he has created and sold. He has lead the flagship university of this state for the past decade, reaching significant milestones while simultaneously being more and more underfunded by the state. He has unquestionably made a large contribution in the last 20 years. But even as a professor at UK 25+ years ago (which, in and of itself, is an important contribution) Dr. Todd sought to make a difference outside of the classroom. Making an impact was not something that crossed his mind when he took over the presidency of UK in 2001, or when he started his first company, it has been pervasive throughout his life,

even when that ‘sphere of influence’ was not very big. And it still exists today, now that he’s ‘retired’.

“Well, guys, I’m sixty five...” we could just see the wheels turning, as if saying “I only have one life to live and it won’t last forever. What am I going to do with these remaining years?”...and then he says it for us: “I’m just trying to think of ways I can make a difference.”

Wow. Here’s one of the most influential people in this state, a person that’s lived a life that we aspire to and hope to emulate if we dedicate ours similarly. He’s achieved a level of success and influence that we are very statistically unlikely to achieve, yet he still feels personally called to make the largest, most positive contribution he can...and maybe one even larger than that..

You know what Dr. Todd? We’ve only been at this for a few years and we probably have 65 more in front of us...but we were just thinking the same thing.

People have told me that my enthusiasm for changing the world will dwindle over time, that I’ll get realistic. I’ve been told “first a man wants to change the world, then he wants to change his neighborhood...eventually he just wants to change his underwear”. This has always frustrated me. Just because many of the people sharing this advice have gone through this process in their own life or seen it in others doesn’t mean it will happen in me, and even if it might why on earth would you want to discourage that attitude in anyone? Yes, enthusiasm must eventually bring with it wisdom in order to increase its likelihood of manifesting into something of significance. But while enthusiasm without wisdom is sometimes reckless, wisdom without action is always impotent.

We don’t know exactly the best way to go about ‘starting and growing high tech, creative, and entrepreneurial companies and communities’. It’s a pretty ambitious goal for a few twenty-somethings with no money, in a state more famous for bourbon and chicken than software and art. But we believe that these aspects of the human being, the desire to solve problems and answer questions that haven’t been answered before, the desire to create something of beauty and significance, and the desire to grow an idea beyond yourself, are present not only at MIT but in every person given permission to pursue them and given some guidance along that journey. Though we are only on that journey ourselves, we hope to provide an example, an opportunity, and some guidance for others to do the same.

I’m sure Dr. Todd has been accused of being ‘reckless’ at times. People have ‘worried about his priorities’. But he was too worried about making a difference beyond himself because he saw the potential in the people around him too...and we think he’s pretty awesome for it.

### 3. He thinks big.

Rule #22 “Go big or...don’t be my friend”

As Dr. Todd talks about making a difference he speaks about what he can do for Kentucky. Yes, that's one person, talking about how he's trying to affect the lives of over 4.3 million people. While he is one of the most influential people in the state, he's just one guy. This is something that you can see he realizes and frustrates him at times, but that doesn't stop him from thinking big. And just like his mindset of making a difference has been pervasive throughout his career and life, so has his tendency to set progressively larger goals one could easily call ‘beyond reasonable’. UK, a top 20 research institute? Turning down a buyout from Hughes Aircraft? Running a company while you are a full-time professor? Even his decision to start what became his first company was an act of big thinking, and the reason we met at Arby’s, as he explains in his Founders Series Video (coming out 10/3/11).

When we think big, it's about growing Team Alpha, or our Awesome Labs projects, or running a Team Alpha X program with some of the sharpest young entrepreneurs in the nation. We dream about BuildingLayer being acquired by Google for eight figures and automatically turning forty UK graduates into (wealthy) Google employees in the process. We think about putting an Entreprenur Hall of Fame in each state and seeing the awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship grow throughout the United States. We don't think as big as Dr. Todd does now, but neither did he when he was our age. He did, however, think big enough then to eventually get where he is now, though, so we hope we're at least on the right track.

### 4. He's not all talk.

This is what gives substance to our common definition of ‘Awesome stuff’, his lifelong mindset of making a significant difference, and his desire to think and act just beyond (and sometimes far beyond) his present means. While he

did just listen and respond during lunch, his history of results speaks for itself and that is what made his presence alone light such a fire under us. I have no doubts that Dr. Todd's next act will be even more ‘Awesome’ than his previous ones.

“So guys, how did I do?” I asked my friends as we stood outside, watching Dr. Todd pulling out into South Limestone St. traffic in his tan Cadillac. I had interrupted him at least a handful of times with an “US TOO!” kind of story or anecdote about our experiences as entrepreneurs, students, community organizers, etc. I hoped I'd get some encouragement that I wasn't distastefully rude...perhaps just naively so. “You did all right, man.” Nick

responded, with a smile “It was a good balance of energy, since Brian and I were so dead tired”. While this was probably the nicest way he could think of to say “you were just a level below embarrassing” he was actually right about balance.

Nick had just started his company, Awesome Inc has been around for two and a half years, APAX (Brian’s company) has been going on for almost twice that, and Dr. Todd had a lifetime of experience...and from these different perspectives we were all working on how the conversation at that table could happen between more people and more frequently than once every three years. If Dr. Todd continues to be as awesome as he has been, I have no doubts that more people more often will be doing just that.

## Our rock stars aren't like your rock stars

*Published March 22, 2010 Written by Brian Raney Hits: 659*

One of the pictures on the break room wall at Awesome Inc is of Tom Perkins. I would speculate that most of my friends don't know of Tom Perkins. Most of them probably don't even know of his venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, (KPCB) which happens to be one of the first and most successful VC firms in Silicon Valley. Of course my friends heads will turn when you mention some of the companies in the KPCB portfolio: Google, Amazon, Compaq. Tom Perkins is just one of the almost forty entrepreneurial rock stars on our wall at Awesome Inc.

Redefining the definition of "awesome" has been a core mission of Awesome Inc since we opened the doors almost a year ago. Whether it's through rewarding success, encouraging failure, or recruiting all-stars, we plan to change the social norm. Awesome Inc is working to provide an environment where if you aren't doing something innovative, starting your own business or building something of value, you're the odd one out. It's about creating a culture where hard work, innovation, and taking risks are not only encouraged, but rewarded.

Everyone on our rock star wall has done something "awesome". Not in the sense that they are famous for what they've done, but rather that they took on insurmountable odds and took ridiculous chances where failure seemed not only probable, but almost certain. And they all did it in pursuit of their own definition of awesome.

People like Larry Page & Sergey Brin who redefined the internet search engine with the creation of Google. People like Ralph G. Anderson whose company, Belcan, made only \$200 in the first three years, but later went onto employ 4,000 people and earns \$250 Mil annually. People like David Cohen of Techstars and Paul Graham of Y Combinator who are currently changing the way investments are made in startups. People like Lee Todd who chose challenge over comfort every step of the way from his small town in Earlington, KY, to Murray, to UK, to MIT, to launching a company that was later sold to IBM. People like Jack Welch who worked his way up from junior engineer to become CEO of GE.

These are just some of the names that make up the wall of rock stars, their picture forming a giant "A" and "I" on the walls at Awesome Inc.

So, while our rock stars may not be like your rock stars (rule #2, Intel, 2009) they do have one thing in common: they are changing the world.

## The only thing that's easy is taking a nap

Published November 18, 2011 Written by Luke Murray Hits: 657

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...



rule # 22

Go big or don't be my friend

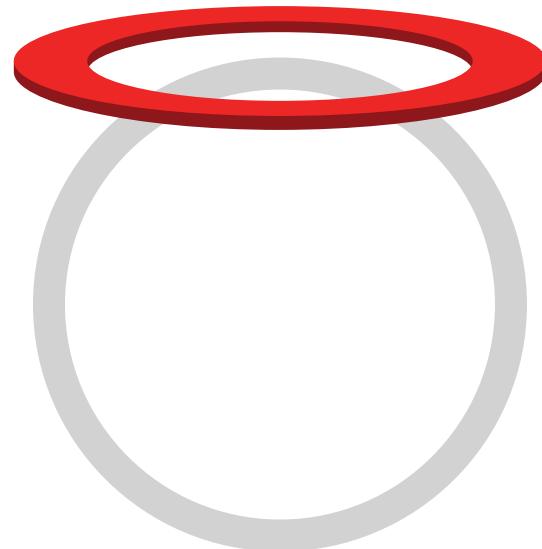


At Awesome Inc, we have lots of silly rules and traditions. These things are fun and add personality to what we do, but we want to be clear about what we really stand for. Now, we of course have the explicit goal of 'starting and growing high tech, creative, and entrepreneurial companies in communities...in fun, cool ways' and there are plenty of ways in which we can and are accomplishing this. The point, though, is that we need to be clear about the principles with which we want to pursue this grand vision as a whole, and each specific endeavor we undertake to manifest it.

Below are the four core values that guide every decision we make at Awesome Inc.

# be: Good

*Core Value #1*



## LIVE WITH HONESTY & INTEGRITY

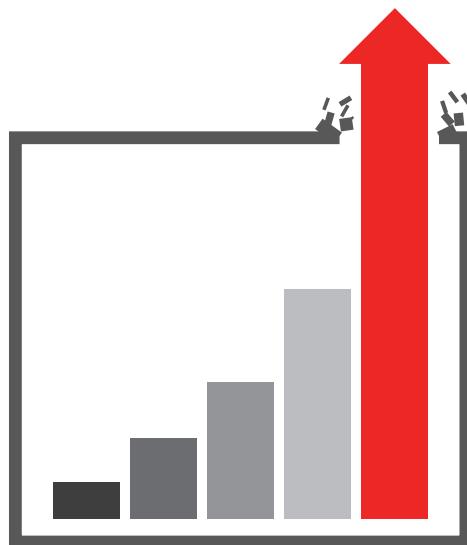
- Honesty - tell the truth
- Integrity - have moral principles and follow them
- Emulate people of Character

## SERVE OTHERS

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

# be: Excellent

*Core Value #2*



## BE A WINNER

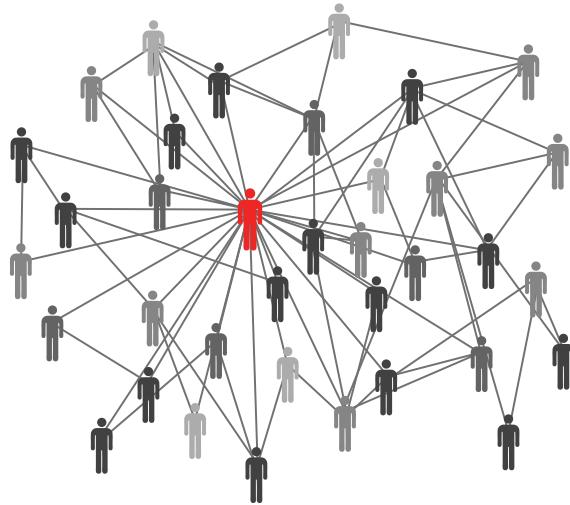
- Have a winning mind set
- Create winning habits

## EXECUTE

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

# be: A Friend

*Core Value #3*



## BRING THE FUN

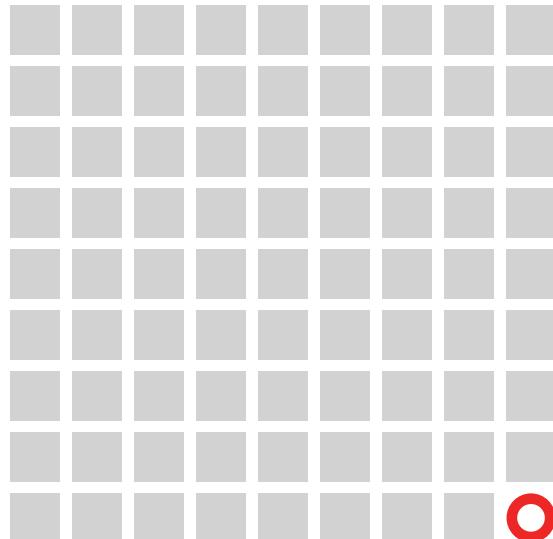
- To yourself - You are responsible for your own fun and happiness
- To others - If you aren't giving your customers and coworkers happiness in some form, you aren't giving them what they want

## NOTHING IS MORE AWESOME THAN PEOPLE

- “Do Live” with your coworkers
- Love your Customers and treat them like human beings

# be: You

*Core Value #4*



## FORGET 'EM

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

## DO YOUR THING

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

## GAME WILL RECOGNIZE GAME

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



When it stops being fun, do something awkward

# 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. 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.

# Nick Such

*Co Founder of Awesome Inc*



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.

# 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 it's 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.

## 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.

## TESTIMONIALS

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 4:00am all the time. I have numerous pics of Awesome Inc on a Friday night and it is a simiar 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.
- 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 Touch, a touch screen business and subsidiary of Awesome Labs.
- 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 and is currently working with Nick Such and myself to raise funding for this venture.

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.

# 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

*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 Stuf 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

## TESTIMONIALS

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.

# Garret Ebel

*Director of Friendship, Former Team Alpha*



I first learned about Awesome Inc through my MGT 491 Small Business Management class in the fall of 2009. The first time I walked into Awesome Inc I was a gunshy college senior pretending to understand what “real” business was. I have always been a pretty good student, so I can remember being attentive during short presentations by both Brian Raney and Jay Knoblett, and remember walking around wide eyed as I toured through the space. I specifically remember my OCD kicking in as we toured through an unorganized cluster-f of what Brian called Awesome Labs. I remember thinking to myself, “Damn this place needs some serious work.” As the tour continued I remember being in awe of the break room complete with a piano, fusball, and ping pong table. I had heard about work environments that allowed employees to be free and creative but had certainly never worked for such a company. However it wasn’t until I watched Luke Murray do “the thing” that I began to realize what Awesome Inc was truly about. Awesome Inc is not just a hip and innovative space in downtown Lexington where hopeful entrepreneurs go to start new businesses. Awesome Inc is a sanctuary for people exploring their passions to better understand what the heck it is that they truly want out of life. I have recently struggled with a personal dilemma; to either pursue my MBA at the University of Kentucky or work full time for Awesome Touch, the newest subsidiary company of Awesome Inc. By far, this decision has been the most difficult choice I have had to make thus far in my young life. However, this decision has taught me more about myself than I could have ever hoped to learn. The opportunities Awesome Inc has afforded me have consistently challenged me both as a young professional and as a person striving to make the most out of the talents with which God has blessed me. For that I will always be grateful. Thanks to everyone at Awesome Inc for believing in me and pushing me to ask the hard life questions.

# Susannah Sizemore

*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.

# 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?

# Therese Henrickson

*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.

# 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.)

# 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.

# 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.

## Keith Kurzendoerfer

*Team Alpha*



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

## 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.

## Julie 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.

## Ben: Blueprint Saints

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.

# Jarod Thornton

*Team Alpha*



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.

# Tylar 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.

# Amy Duncan

*Team Alpha*



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. To experience Awesome Inc is to experience life.

# 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.

# Melanie Stoeckle

*Team Alpha*



Right down to the name, Awesome Inc truly is awesome and embodies everything about that word. From ending meetings with the song #3 to posters of the company rules hanging in the space to the mandatory wristband as your uniform, this really is the best internship I could have asked for and the best place to work. Period. And let’s not forget about the people. Awesome Inc honestly attracts good people, and a lot of it is because of their core values and the people that do work here. They’re incredibly supportive, inspiring and passionate about what they do and it rubs off on you immediately. I knew before I even started interning here that I wouldn’t want to leave this place.

# Theresa Simcic

*Grant Writer and 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.

# Charlotte Arnold

*Team Alpha*



Awesome Inc made my ideas happen because I was encouraged, helped, and inspired by everyone there.

# 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!

## “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.



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



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 it's 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.



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



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



No excuses, play like a champion



Always do something awesome over something not awesome