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EGR 201

**My Journal**

Damn, I really want this guy’s life. CEO Aaron Marshall of Over. A small startup in Cape Town, South Africa where I worked this summer. This is why I want to be an entrepreneur… because I watch Aaron absolutely love every second of his life and his work. He’s passionate, works hard, is fun to be around, has a nice and welcoming family, and is living in the best city of the world. Whatever it means to “be an entrepreneur”—I’m not exactly sure yet at the beginning of the course—that’s what I want to be.

This summer I was doing iOS development for Over, a photo editing app for iPhone. The company had about 15 people, and they were growing—three developers were hired during the short four weeks that I was there. Aaron had the typical “drop-out-of-college-and-start-your-own-company” story and he was doing pretty well. From America, started the company in Oregon, moved to Cape Town with his wife to have three kids and really build the company. This was where the real genius was—he and his employees were making American dollars in Cape Town, where the dollar is worth about 15 times the Rand. Not to mention, Cape Town is an unbelievably beautiful city with breathtaking hiking, swimming, shark cage diving, skydiving, cliff diving—lots of diving—exciting nightlife, tons of culture, and a young and fun techy and startupy vibe. I mean I worked in a freakin’ glass box with treadmill desks and 15 people that loved every second of their job. And so did I. I did impactful work and loved every second in the city (man is it cheap to live there as an American!). And believe it or not, the co-founder and COO is a Princeton grad! What are the chances I’d end up working for a random small startup in Cape Town that was founded in part by a Princeton grad?! The orange network goes a long way. Matt Winn is his name and he, by the way, does not have a home—he’s spent the last couple years Airbnb’ing his way around the world. He does have a small storage unit in San Francisco, so he’s not completely crazy.

But this kind of life is the life I want to live. It’s fun, exciting, rewarding, unorthodox. And it’s challenging. Aaron told me about all the times he almost gave up. Sold the company. He had some pretty generous offers. But at the last second he decided to keep it because it’s what he loved to do. It’s hard, but he enjoys it and he’s happy, and the company is doing well. I learned a lot from Aaron. He is serving as an inspiration to me. I take back what I said about wanting his life. I want to do it myself!

Working for Over was the first time I felt what it *could* be like to be an entrepreneur. This summer, I also felt what it *was* like when I was given four days to create an entire app and present it to 200 people. Pressed for time, low on resources, feeling lost—all feelings an entrepreneur gets at one point or another. I ended up with “Learnt.” **(IDEA).** Inspired by this new city and the tons of things I didn’t know about it, Learnt is a social media platform for Today I Learned’s. People would post things like “Today I learned that the Origin coffee shop has the best coffee in the world.” The idea was that others in the city would see this and go check out Origin and maybe see a new part of the city at the same time. It was aimed to be an engine for travelers to discover the ins and outs of a city. You would see posts in your area, follow people, share posts, favorite posts, etc. So I made the MVP in four days (although it wasn’t even viable—I didn’t have time to make a backend, just a user interface so I could make the presentation). And the people loved it. I actually got a standing O. Aaron was there watching and joked, “I didn’t know you were so popular.” “Neither did I,” I said. Through this experience I think I learned that I have what it takes to be an entrepreneur. I was able to pitch this sub-par app that I built in four days and convince the people that it was cool. I haven’t been able to continue on the app yet, I doubt it would even go anywhere, but it was very fulfilling to make my own thing for the first time. Perhaps the most valuable part of the experience was the feedback I received at the end. Members of different startups were there and they told me they loved my delivery of the idea and the idea itself. But they presented issues to me, and I was grateful for that. “What’s stopping someone from posting something like ‘Today I learned that my girlfriend sucks,’” one of them said. If I wanted Learnt to be a source of knowledge and exploration, then I would have to vet each and every post and get rid of the BS ones. Is that feasible for a startup? Probably not. Who knows. I was never completely in love with the idea; I was forced to work with it because I had so little time. But it could be fun to flesh out.

In Rotternberg’s terms, I’m definitely a gazelle. Or at least I hope to be… Skunk doesn’t fit me currently because I don’t work for a large corporation. I guess I could be a dolphin if I had a great idea in the public sector. If I did, I would definitely pursue it—it’s not like I would ignore it because its “social entrepreneurship.” I want to impact change on the world in whatever way possible. I don’t think I’m a butterfly because I want to do something bigger (that is not at all downplaying the role of butterflies—I admire what they do, I just learned from reading this book that that is not what I intend to be). So I take back what I said about “definitely being a gazelle”—if I end up working for a large corporation, something I do not intend to do, then I would do my best to become a skunk. The other day I applied for a software development internship at Square—the credit card reader and small-business-payment helper thing (they do a lot of stuff). I’m not exactly passionate about what they do but I’m trying to apply for a ton of internships in case I don’t get any (stressful). I was immediately shocked **(IDEA)** that they don’t have a mobile app that allows customers to, for example, order and pay for their coffee before even getting to the coffee shop. When they get there, their coffee would be ready and paid for, just needing to be picked up. I would certainly use this to buy coffee, Chipotle, or any non-sit-down food option. I know there are other apps that do this, but Square, with its already existing market power, I think could do it much more successfully and reach many more businesses. Oh wait, as I’m writing this I just googled this and Square already does it. Guess I couldn’t find it on the website when I was looking earlier. The importance of researching the market when you have an idea!!! Or c’mon Square, make this easier to find on your website. Welp, there goes that.

Today I Learned that I could not do what the founders of Project Shed did! Devote six months with no pay and no other commitments just to *finding* the idea?? I admire it, but I don’t think I could do it. I could not do the “let the idea come to the team” model of entrepreneurship. What if they didn’t find anything? What if the team was the wrong fit for the idea that they eventually find? I hold them in high regard but I could not do it. I would always start with the idea then make the team. Or maybe brainstorm every night for 3 hours with some friends that I knew I wanted to work with. But not devote 6 months of my life with the chance of nothing being at the end of the tunnel! I look at myself as a risk taker, but this is a risk that I am not willing nor that I would want to take. Even Rottenberg, in her chapter about risk, says “Once you have your idea and are convinced it will fly, how far should you go?” (43). She is all about taking risks, and doesn’t even mention the possibility of trying to force an idea with a group of people with the possibility of never finding one.

On the topic of risk, Rottenberg’s stalking story stuck with me most. Waiting outside peoples’ offices, confronting them when they might not want to be bothered, going the extra mile to see someone or have some conversation or stalk the competition. I realized that this is a quality that I need to pick up. Sometimes I just say, “Eh, I’ll email them later,” or “I don’t want to bother them.” This is never how people are successful. I need to just say “screw it!” and go talk to them if it could be meaningful. There is nothing to lose, only the possibility of gain. *There is nothing to lose*. Get that through my head!

Quick thought—because most of my experience in the tech field is in iOS development and making iPhone apps, I think sometimes I am only thinking about “what’s the next big app, or what kind of app could I make better.” I need to get this out of my brain and start thinking outside of that small box—the whole world is open to entrepreneurship. Stop just thinking about apps!!! Very few successful companies start out as just iPhone apps. Many of them have apps, sure, but their central ideas are much greater and more widespread.

My junior independent work seminar is called “Invention and Innovation: Entrepreneurial Lessons for Computer Scientists.” The point of the seminar is to guide our independent work, which must include making an entrepreneurial venture through a piece of software that we create. Right now, **(IDEA)** a partner and I are thinking of making an Airbnb for food. People would sign up to be “chefs” and allow others who are looking for a cheap meal to pay them and join in on a home cooked meal. On the app (mobile and/or web) the “chefs,” say, at the beginning of the week, would input the meals they are planning on making for that week, how many guests they can accommodate, and how much time in advance their guests must give them. People using the app would be able to sign up for meals and get a nice home-cooked meal for, say, $8-10. The chefs could allow the “eaters” to eat in their home, require them to just pick it up and leave, or offer both options. The idea is to connect people across the world in a new way, similar to Airbnb. It would offer a new way to get an authentic meal while traveling, or, in general, to get a cheap home-cooked meal anywhere (good for college students too). Our research has shown that this has been attempted, but in different ways. One app required the “chefs” to be actual restaurant chefs. This failed, as the chefs were making less money than they would if they chose to just work in a restaurant. Another app only offered a delivery service. Ours would be different, allowing anyone to be a chef and allowing dine-in or takeaway options. Here are some issues:

* How to set prices
* FDA approval?
* People getting weirded out from letting strangers into their home

Another **(IDEA)** we had was a platform for professors to collaboratively write textbooks. Most professors are fully capable of writing books or textbooks, and they want to do it, but they simply don’t have the time. If they could collaborate with other professors around the world using a simple software, many more textbooks could be created and more knowledge could be combined. Students could then pay to use the service, either per textbook or on a subscription for access to everything. This could potentially revolutionize the textbook industry and remove the need for traditional textbooks altogether. As books become e-books more and more, this could be a good market to hit.

(I realize I will focus the entire semester on one of these ideas for my independent work, so I will write my midterm paper about an idea that I choose not to use ☺)

Reading Rottenberg’s book convinced that entrepreneurship is indeed a lifestyle. The ways of thinking, taking risks, being a leader, and being different in which she characterizes entrepreneurs are not just actions in the workplace. These people are *living their lives* in this manner. I learned that when you’re an entrepreneur, your work and your life sort of blend together. And this is not in the negative sense that people sometimes say—“He’s working so much that he doesn’t have a life.” It’s different. Running your own businesses means it is in you, you must think about it all the time and the way you live your life is the way you run the company. They go hand in hand. Entrepreneurs aren’t dreading the entire week and praying that the weekend comes fast. Their work is passionate and challenging; their work is their life and they enjoy it. This is why I want to be an entrepreneur. I never want to go to “work.” I want my work to be my life and my life to be my work. Life = Work if I love what I am doing!

**(IDEA)** A nightlife app that acts as a social media outlet, with a live feed of bar-goers posting about where they are going, which places are popping, and which are dead. The goal would be to also allow people to pay for drinks directly on their phone, and to send an alert to the phone when the drink is ready. This would greatly expedite the process of getting a drink at a busy bar. Bar partnerships are also possible—bars would offer deals and promotions directly on the app. Could work at bar schools or city nightlife in general.

**(IDEA)** An incredible amount of produce goes to waste at grocery stores across the country. This is in part because of the societal need for perfect-looking, shiny fruit with no bruises or blemishes. Many poor neighborhoods have no access to grocery stores in walking distance, and therefore limited access to healthy foods. Fast food is often the only option. There should be a way to get this produce, which the grocery stores end up throwing out, to these poor neighborhoods at a discounted price. The grocery store would input the inventory of food that they are about to throw out, and we would somehow transport it to somewhere in need. Not a very profitable venture, but would be good for the world.

**(IDEA)** The racial divide was very evident in Cape Town. I want to somehow bridge this gap. Maybe a language learning service? Input the languages you know and the languages you want to learn, and get paired with someone who knows the languages you want to learn and wants to learn the languages that you know. This could help bridge the gap because blacks in Cape Town speak a variety of languages, whereas whites only speak English and/or Afrikaans. English needs to be known to get jobs. Could be a language learning/cultural meetup app. Spread language and dissolve the social divide!