

“IF I HAVE SEEN FURTHER, IT IS ONLY BY STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS.”

ISAAC NEWTON

I believe if I achieve anything as an artist, businesswoman, or entrepreneur, those successes can be partially attributed to the prior discoveries and work of minds before me. Two said giants are Jeff Bezos, the man behind what is now being called “The Everything Store”¹, and Johannes Gutenberg, the father of the fact.

Both have carved new paths for humanity, and set the ebb and flow of their time through innovation in their respective spheres.

I seek to understand the uncommon roads they've taken, hope to one day walk down them, and then forge my own.

Johannes Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press, disrupted oral society.² Gutenberg was a man of many talents, and many metaphorical hats—he was a craftsman, a businessman, and an engineer. Gutenberg the entrepreneur primarily saw his main customer as religious institutions, and started his printing with indulgences for the Catholic Church. While the press was not necessarily a fresh innovation, Gutenberg the craftsman drew from his knowledge in gold smithing to introduce the technique of metal typecasting², which effectively threw the world into a print making frenzy.

The printing press's influence soon spiraled out of Gutenberg's control. People of the time began book collecting, and developed an expanded worldview.² Science and facts became commonplace as records of knowledge allowed for new ideas to build upon newly paved intellectual foundations. Ultimately, the means through which people spoke and communicated forever changed. It can even be said that in its introduction of mass production and widely circulated knowledge, Gutenberg's printing press instigated the Industrial Revolution. The Protestant Reformation can also be attributed to Gutenberg and his press—Luther's 95 Theses would not have reached the virality they did without the now widespread ability to copy and distribute ideas one resonated with.³

Gutenberg's strength lied in his ability to use the technology around him, likely the wine press, as inspiration to dream up new innovations.

He was able to equip a different lens, and in turn, created a different world.

Gutenberg's weakness, however, was his lack of business savvy that ultimately lost him his investor's faith, and eventually, his investment. His medieval “unicorn” venture reached an end as he ran out of capital and was forced to surrender his printing equipment. Gutenberg was disrupted by a world that wanted to move faster than he allowed

himself to work for the sake of craftsmanship. Another weakness, consequently, may have been his artistry, and his desire to perfect all he did. This contrasts heavily with Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, who has changed the world in this generation through his offering of services that have changed forever the way we shop and browse the web.

If there's anything telling about Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, it's that he originally wanted to name his e-commerce platform relentless.com.⁴

amazon.com isn't far from the tree either—it's named after an unforgiving, powerful, and winding force of nature, and now lives up to its name as an influence that continues to change the world in profound ways. Amazon started with selling books, and has now expanded to services spanning industries far and wide, from content creation good enough to win Emmy awards⁴ to owning a third of the cloud computing market with Amazon Web Services⁴. How has he managed to achieve success and disrupt across such a broad spectrum?

Bezos, in the purest sense of the phrase, isn't afraid to fail. Products like the Amazon Fire phone, although relatively unsuccessful, prove that Amazon is willing to experiment under psychological safety.

Jeff Bezos is a visionary with a strong compass. While Amazon's strategy over the years has consisted of throwing new products at the wall and seeing what sticks, the throwing has had a distinct rhythm and bigger picture. Former vice president of Amazon attested to a culture, "stubborn on vision, and flexible on details."⁶ Vision, therefore, is the true forte of Amazon. A bigger picture isn't to say that Amazon hasn't mastered the details, however—the advent of Amazon Prime Now⁷, a service available to Prime members that makes deliveries in two hours or less, testifies to the level of perfection Amazon has achieved with its distribution and fulfillment chain. Bezos's brainchild has proved to have become a force worthy of its namesake—

one dynamic and powerful that carves its own path, and in turn forms the terrain around it.

Newsweek has gone as far as to state, "Today, the question is not whether Amazon can survive, but whether we can survive without Amazon."⁴

While I haven't revolutionized the ancient world or the current one, I see many characteristics with both Gutenberg and Bezos reflected in myself. With Gutenberg, I share versatility. Gutenberg was a merchant, an engineer, and an artist, which can ultimately be translated to how I see myself—a combination of business, the sciences, and art. I believe

Gutenberg's work with the printing press was possible because he had variable perspectives, and believe my hybrid perspective will allow me to think differently and thus innovate differently. I also agree with Bezos's openness to failure, and the psychological safety he promotes at Amazon. He embodies "adapt or die", and makes it company culture to not be afraid to make mistakes, which I seek to foster when working with others.

With Bezos I share vision. I hope to catalyze future discoveries and innovations in the world by pioneering in the augmented and virtual reality spaces. While the barrier into the market is far too high at the moment for people to truly experience the power of the platforms, I believe it's the next frontier for the industry. Just as the advent of facts in books allowed us to reference and build off of existing ideas, technologies like augmented reality will allow us to augment our human experience. Adding another layer to our lives is another layer of productivity, another layer for learning, and another layer that will advance us as a society.

What I don't share is far more, however.

The only pride I hold in this journey is knowing what I don't know,

because the rest of myself I'm unsure of. It's difficult to compare myself to these giants in terms of work ethic, dedication, and passion simply because I don't feel I've yet reached the arena to truly test and challenge those parts of myself. There's comfort in not knowing who I am yet, but also comfort in knowing there are figures to reference through this journey.

The characteristics I share with Gutenberg and Bezos, and even those I don't, chip and chisel away at the clean marble block that is my story. Whether I become a river or pave a road for myself or others to come, I know I stand on the shoulders of giants, continuing work from brilliant minds for the brilliant minds to come.

BY ANNIE OH