

On My Cofounder, Logan

Dear YC:

Please excuse this break from tradition. Rather than tell you more about myself, I've decided to take the liberty to tell you about Logan, my fellow Cofounder. He's probably the most humble person I know, so he's never going to write about himself — and even if he does, he's never going to tell you the things about him that I know make him the Cofounder capable of executing this vision to transform the dynamics within the defense tech ecosystem. So now I'm going to tell you why I knew I needed Logan.

I spent my October and November working on this vision part-time and squaring away as much legal stuff as possible. I had the problem I wanted to solve; the seeds of an idea; and now I needed a highly capable cofounder. During this time, I also consumed an unhealthy amount of Dalton & Michael videos. The two of them have a great camaraderie on screen that makes you feel like they've founded a startup together before — particularly their humorous and realist candor about all the *lows* of startup life.

As Logan often says, I was an *influencer behind the curtain* at Orbital Insight so I already had a very unique experience that gifted a differentiated perspective than my peers about what it takes to both found and *continuously operate* a startup. Many people think startups are fun — you build cool tech, you go on great luxury retreats, you choose your own work hours and if capitalized well, you get paid well and can even make it big.

Logan and I were 2 of the first 5 members of Orbital Insight's Defense Tech Team. We were a startup within a startup — so although we had fun; it wasn't necessarily the unifying theme of our experience... In ways, it felt like we reported to two sets of investors — the C-Suite *and* the Board, who regularly debated the merit of the defense team's continued existence.

Spending a lot of time in C-Suite and board meetings as well as with the exec team and their families personally, I witnessed things others didn't see:

- the legal battles trying to keep our specialized computer vision scientists on work visas in the country
- all the times years before the pandemic when our bank accounts were empty while we patiently waited for the next round to close and had to scramble up some inventive way to make payroll
- the illusions that the exec team was making exorbitant executive compensation, when in reality I watched two of them give up some of their meager cash compensation to avoid laying off two key personnel members on their team
- all the times the exec team had to explain any time our projections were off and we didn't make our numbers for that quarter; even if a contract award had been issued but we could not yet book the revenue according to ASC606
- the annoyance of a thing called ASC606 and how it almost murdered our Series D round
- receiving an eerie copy of Sequoia Capital's Black Swan Memo from Bill Coughran during COVID-19

- the wear and tear on the CEO and COO's personal family life, where vacations were usually 12 hour day sales retreats and a critical fundraising meeting competed against the high school graduation of their only child

So I have no illusions. This is going to be fucking hard. And this idea is quite contrarian and seeks to disrupt a cadre of very wealthy defense advisors that have made their living preying on unknowledgeable startups that have few mechanisms to fact check or defend themselves against their worst enemy – bad advice. The recent ousting (and then reinstatement) of Sam Altman was another timely gift of clarity: I needed someone who would be capable of fighting for this idea and someone I would trust to be CEO if for any reason at all I couldn't. I needed someone who I could trust to push me to get out of my own way but still have demonstrated reliability on the routine days or even the cringey ones in the trenches. To execute any idea to solve such a systemic problem, I needed someone who I knew without any doubt was as courageous and cool-headed as they were competent.

That's Logan.

Logan and I met each other on Tuesday, November 14, 2017. I still lived in Texas at the time but had traveled to DC to interview with Orbital Insight's new Defense Team. On his way to lunch, he and another coworker passed by me in the hallway. He waved hello. I waved hello. My interviewer came up and told me "that was Logan and Mike. Should we head upstairs?"

The interview went well, but I was new to the startup world, my family told me I was making a mistake and even though it sounded like an adventure, I still harbored some doubts. I jetted across town in 2 hours of Beltway traffic to a workshop hosted by the United States Geospatial Intelligence Foundation's (USGIF) Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence Working Group. I had been calling into the weekly lunch meetings for 6 months from San Antonio so I knew some names but hadn't actually *met* anyone there yet. The room was buzzing as I scanned name tags trying to find one I recognized as a good candidate to sit with. I couldn't find one. There were no name tags.

"Hi CeCe."

I whipped around.

"I'm Logan. I saw you earlier interviewing at Orbital." His hand reached out to shake mine.

That was the moment I decided I was going to move my entire life across the country and leave my architecture career behind to work at Orbital Insight. You see, as an Air Force Intelligence brat that grew up in Military City USA during the stand up of the military's cyber intelligence infrastructure, I know when you're part of the Defense and Intelligence Community – directly or serving via association – you operate in the shadows and your job is to remain persistently present but *unseen*. It takes a certain type of defiant charisma and courage to take the risk of making someone who is sort of a stranger to you, feel seen in a space where blending in is the overwhelming modus operandi. Logan had passed me in a hallway 7 hours earlier and rather than even hesitate to see whether I'd *even recognized* or remembered him, he boldly walked straight up and "re"-introduced himself to me.

He also pushed me around the rest of the night. (*I mean, the **nerve** of this random Orbital dude...*) At networking hour, he introduced me to anyone he'd met before and targeted corners of people who

thought it'd be strategic for either of us to meet. He subtly repeatedly pushed me outside of my comfort zone in a way I didn't even realize until later reflecting upon my impressive collection of business cards.

We worked together at Orbital and Labelbox — and this journey was not always a joy ride. There were definitely some great highs but I've experienced several setbacks in life so I tend to focus on the lows. The lows — though painful — are really the atoms of life that gift you great clarity. It's like no matter how disillusioned you may have been before, you are suddenly gifted (ha) this great discernment of where you stand with everyone and what and whom really matters to you and whether *you* actually matter to *them*. The hardest part of weathering these storms is usually the disappointment — but again; I have no illusions so the lows are the area where I'm generally most curious. Things we experienced:

- fighting the C-Suite for Palo Alto computer vision resources on an Intelligence program where the company decided “we’re just not going to deliver” — even though the customer had already paid us the money
- staying up all night working on a 300 page proposal for a \$14M contract that our team would actually be able to book as recurring revenue; winning the contract; then the standup of Space Force canceling the entire budget for the program, forcing us to find another agency to fill in the new buzz cut to our bottom line
- spending 6 weeks + weekends preparing our company's internal data labeling tool to be used as a workaround on Project Maven since it was the only data labeling tool capable of labeling both electro-optical (EO) and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imagery; winning a contract for it; and then watching a new anti-SAR leader in the company force us to sunset the product
- celebrating with our highly anticipated new Head of Federal at a holiday party, then finding out via email on January 3rd (my birthday) that this community-beloved Special Operator who had deployed double digit times to notoriously dangerous missions had tragically died 10 minutes from his house in a car accident in the middle of Virginia, leaving behind 3 children under the age of 9.

These are a select recounting of many similar other setbacks.

Whether he realizes it or not, Logan is a pioneer. First on the scene, through and through Logan bleeds Marine. I've watched him be the first in a role and stand up, align and serve 3 teams. Logan exemplifies servant leadership and consistently is able to leverage influence to gain consensus among team members and stakeholders with diverse and sometimes even opposing opinions and needs. Logan is the type of organizational glue that empowers and expands the potential of everyone around them by ensuring their operational needs are captured, clarified and met. Logan's experience:

- supporting the massive behind the scenes data operations that powered Orbital Insight's suite of 50+ computer vision and data science normalization algorithms on satellite imagery and geolocation data
- successfully selling the same dual use PaaS (defense) and SaaS (commercial) platform to a diverse set of end users with widely varying needs by articulating specific actionable intelligence they could derive from the product

- curating both reusable and custom demos and tutorials that end users could use to compel their purchasing authority to buy, deploy and continuously support the product
- starting out as the first solutions engineer at Labelbox and building a functioning solutions engineering organization capable of supporting an early-stage, high-growth Sales Org
- transitioning to single-handedly stand up a Channel Partnership and strategic vendor management program at Labelbox which became the company's primary source of revenue — particularly during a turbulent time when the product roadmap, business model and pricing model needed to rapidly adapt to meet the surge of LLMs
- digging in to do whatever is necessary, undeterred by internal or external politics and obstacles to fight for the Warfighter — the end users that drive him because he's walked in their shoes

— these things only represent a *meager handful* of reasons I wanted to build a company with Logan. So in December, I gathered all my research and my bits of an idea and got ready to tell him about it to see what he would say and before I reached out, a magical thing happened.

Logan texted *me*, asking *me* if I wanted to found a defense tech company. And to let him know *if I had any ideas*.

There are three overarching lessons I've learned from my defense tech startup journey so far:

- Transformational technology cannot overcome poor leadership decision-making
- The difference between successful startups and failed startups is often down to operational **execution** of ideas rather than conceptualization of ideas
- There is no valley of death. There is a cycle of valleyss of death that one must continually traverse. And the best hope of survival starts with strategically assembling the right team.

Any team embarking on a dangerous mission to disrupt the dynamics of our nation's defense tech ecosystem during the middle of ongoing geopolitical conflict across many countries needs a courageous, committed and competent operator.

And that's Logan.