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THE ENTREPRENEUR

Ali Malik : The Adventurous Entrepreneur

January 2022

W5

From the W5 Projects Team

Dear W5 Community,

We are very excited to unveil the third edition of **The Entrepreneur by W5 - The Western Entrepreneurship Association**. This publication provides grounds for entrepreneurs to share their experiences and knowledge with some of the most aspiring students at Western University. We hope students become inspired and use the skills they learn from these entrepreneurs on their professional and personal development journeys.

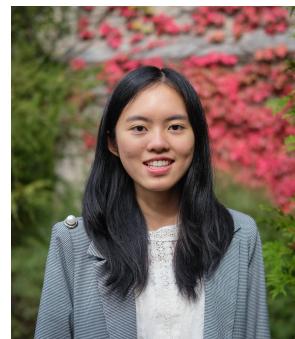
Becoming and growing as an entrepreneur is a process that requires time and patience. This Publication tackles the challenges one must face when taking on the entrepreneurial journey. It entails risks and obstacles that you will likely face, especially as a student. Learning to mitigate these challenges is one of the essential skills that every entrepreneur needs to know. This edition will teach you to understand these risks and how, as a student, you can take the leap and become successful.

In this edition of The Entrepreneur, we had the pleasure of interviewing Ali Malik, a student at Western University who started his entrepreneurial journey back in high school. The skills he learned from high school carried over to his years in university and his career. After his first year, Ali began working for Trufan, an international data analytics company, where he ultimately became a product manager. When the opportunity arose to jump on a startup called Surf, he did not hesitate. As we will come to learn, working at Surf helped him grow as an individual in many ways. Ali was kind enough to share with us how he landed such a great opportunity and any advice for aspiring Entrepreneurs.

The business world is booming, and we hope to see more young entrepreneurs take advantage of this unique opportunity. Intelligent, driven individuals are the ones who leave the best impact on the world. We hope this issue inspires you to take that leap of faith and hurdle the obstacles that push you back from achieving your entrepreneurial dreams.

Sincerely,

**Rajah Chari & Grace Zhou,
Directors of Projects, W5**



Ali Malik



Ali Malik is a Product Owner at Trufan.
The ex-Community Manager & Voice
of a start-up called Surf.

He is a driven individual who hopes to inspire many young entrepreneurs, which is why he took a gap year from Western University to pursue his passion for entrepreneurship and new ventures.

Tell us a bit about yourself and a bit about the startup company Surf.

My name is Ali, I completed two years at Western University and decided to take my 3rd year off to work, get into tech and pursue things that I am truly passionate about. I recently started working full-time at Trufan as a product owner. The role interests me with the work in leading sprints, developing our product and planning for what is to come next. I decided to take this path to work on the technical skillsets and understandings that I lack.

A recent opportunity came for us to launch an extension called Surf. It's a chrome extension that rewards you for your everyday browsing. For its launch, I worked on much of the marketing. All this includes deciding our branding, building our socials, metric tracking and finding growth-hacking strategies. We like to call all of this Community Management. We've built a strong community at Trufan and want to do the same for Surf.



What was one of your earliest obstacles? An experience that left you with a lesson.

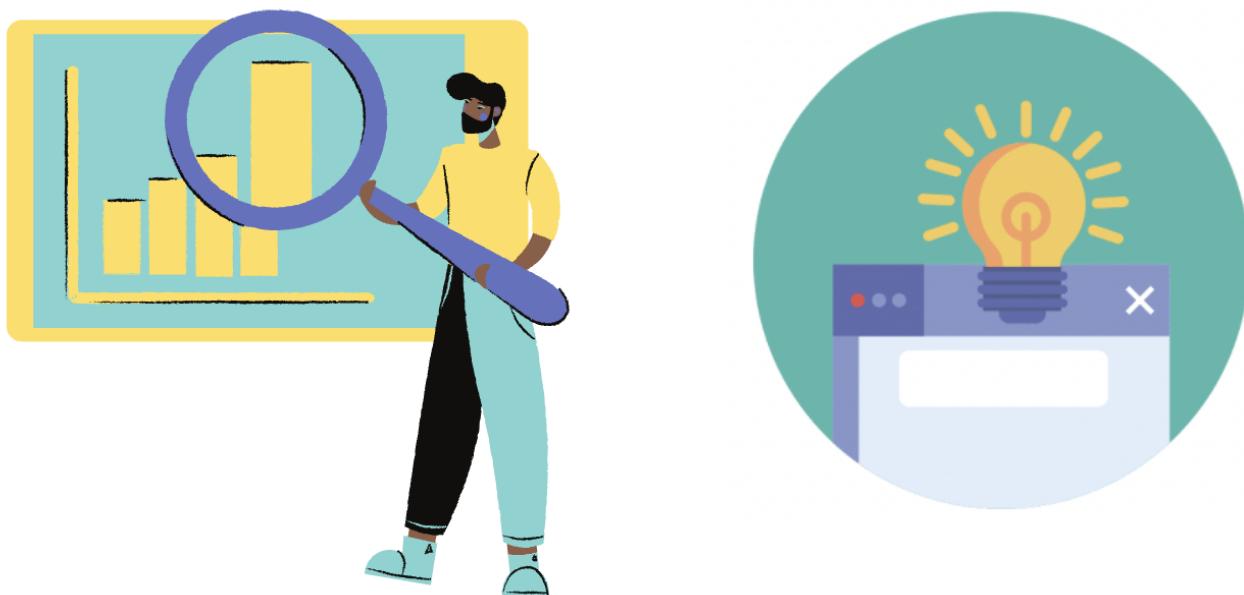
Well when I was younger, the biggest challenge I faced was staying uninformed and oblivious to the way things worked. When I was in Grade 9, I wanted to start a hat/fashion business. I ordered a whole batch of hats from a supplier across the world, they ended up scamming me \$400 (which for a 14-year-old is a lot). I knew this was all my fault. It demonstrated that I didn't put time into researching industries, suppliers and products that I would be working with. All it takes nowadays is a google search. Don't understand the power of just doing a little more research. Be patient and calculate the next steps and risks you want to take.

What inspired the creation of Surf? And where do yourself in Trufan/Surf?

For some context, Surf was started as a sub-brand to Trufan. It came about after having conversations on what we can do to better in the data economy. There are a lot of conversations around first-party data and third-party data. You might have been seeing a lot of media around whistleblowers at big tech companies, or that third-party cookies are going away. With more exposure than ever, users are finding out their data is being taken away from them while they're getting nothing in return. And marketers have found out that they're not going to have third-party cookies for ad purposes in the future. We found this gap to exist on both sides of the conversation.

To bridge that gap, we created an extension called Surf. We created something easy to use while enabling marketers with ethical data. Surf gets added to your browser, tracks your web activity, and then allows you to control what you want to share. When your data is shared, it's anonymized. So we don't track your personal information, and rather aim to focus on demographic data. For example, there is a 19-year-old in London, that enjoys shopping at Nike and Adidas. That's the type of information we share with brands, so it's not intrusive at all.

In exchange for this data, we reward a user for their activity on a daily basis. So as you scroll through more sites, you'll gain more rewards. There are achievements that you can unlock, along with a complete onboarding process, and the ability to refer friends and family for extra points. We do our best to reward users with the points that they earn through a huge catalogue of gift cards and unique prizes like next-gen consoles or some AirPods!



Coming into the new year, we're a fully digital company. This is very interesting since I have colleagues all around the globe. And one would think that this would just make it all the harder to find your place, your voice and adjust. But, our team does an amazing job staying on top of communicating, well if anything we over-communicate. We stay talking to one another, keep conversations going and bridge the gap that this digital world has created.

Speaking about myself, I feel like I've come a long way. From being a very naive little kid who would just think "oh, this could just work without any thinking at all!" to now making sure that I am on top and ahead of what is needed to be done.

How did you get started in technology? Did you explore any other career paths prior?

I've had a history of working minor internships/projects at corporate firms. I worked on some Deloitte partner initiatives, did GE sponsored programs and worked under other companies. Although I am grateful for learning something new at each experience, I wouldn't say those were experiences that led to anything. I found that corporate life isn't for me, every entrepreneurial experience of mine left me so much more fulfilled. **While yes, I had lots of trouble working under micro-managing supervisors. I also struggled to work in larger teams/companies as they have trouble growing quickly and moving lean. For that reason, I knew that I needed a smaller environment to thrive.**

Back in the summer of my Grade 12 year, I met Swish, he runs Trufan. we met as I was doing a keynote at a 24-hour business case competition that he was also speaking at. I later reconnected with him during my first year at Western saying "Hey, you know I would love to try out working at a tech company, I wonder if you have any spots open?". He let me know of an opening, I met the team, we found that there was a good fit and I joined later that summer. I worked there the summer of my first year, along with working part-time through my second year. **I found that once I had joined the tech environment, I felt a part of a system that works well with me. Everyone is extremely independent and at the same time interestingly collaborative.** Meaning while everyone has a unique approach of their own, we all recognize one another's ability and find ways to work off of one another. That's the type of environment that I needed. One where I can make decisions on my own or thrive around other people who are just as hard-working, passionate, and obsessed with problem-solving. Trufan is the environment that allowed me to thrive further and learn more.



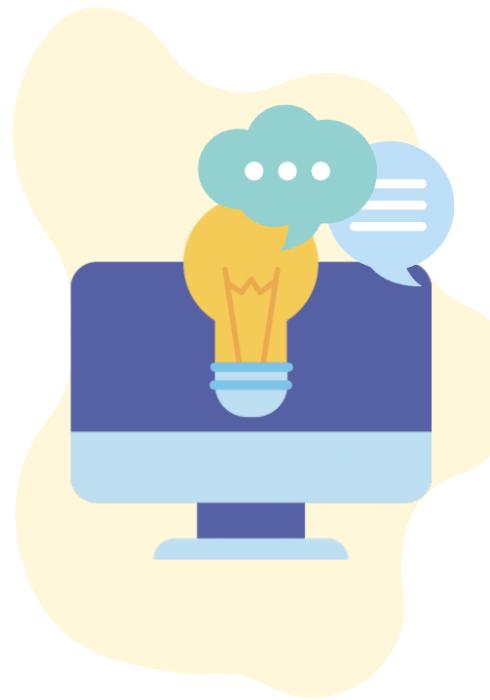
What advice would you give to students thinking about entrepreneurship?

I get a lot of questions from students on this topic and oftentimes they express that "I'm scared to start a business because there is this really scary risk involved". Now yes, **while it is cheesy to say that you learn from your mistakes, I've come around to truly believing it.** If you struggle with accepting this, think about all that is gained from the experience. For a lot of the younger folk, take advantage of the fact that you have years and time to put into use. That is the single most valuable means of dealing available to you. So make use of it. **Take all the potential risks earlier on, while you have the time. Work on that one idea as if it's going to take you to the moon, and learn to come back harder in case it ever fails.**

An obstacle we face when usually starting is that we overcomplicate things. And this can be tough for people who overthink like me to deal with. A practice I've put into place is **accepting that a decision at a moment is cumulative of all the information you have in that period of time. Not the future or the past**, but that current moment. What this allows you to do is shortlist all your possible solutions to what can be done right now and what I am capable of doing. Sometimes we take too much time writing up some big strategy but when you look back, more than half the time none of that ever goes as planned.

You know that thirty-page business plan you once wrote, well you'll notice that in the first month of operations nearly twenty-nine pages of those are just discredited. All that's left is your cover page! Trust me I've been there, **It's all about trial and error.**

Now, remember this, If you're going to take the risk, be introspective. After a lot of self-reflection, if you're still really hesitating to come to a decision, **then it's alright to not take the risk.** Sometimes certain circumstances can't be avoided, or it might just not be the right time. I want to be considerate of the fact that we all have lives that sometimes just can't afford to take some risks. **Your health comes first, entrepreneur or not.**



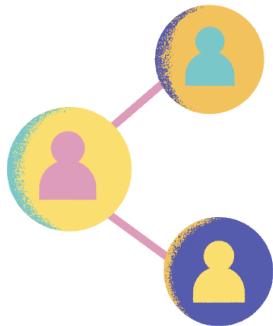
Was being entrepreneurial as a student the right time? Or do you think you should have waited when you were more familiar with the industry?

I think that that question tackles something far greater than "When should I start a business?" There are different thoughts of belief in entrepreneurship. **My belief is to not force a business out. Don't force an idea. Those are the ideas that never work.** Those are more than probable to be a failure. I'm the type of person that needs to do something I believe in. For example, **Surf wasn't a forced idea, Surf was something that came about by understanding.** Ideas can come at any time, back in high school, when I took over a soap-making business. It was just the right time. I forced the hat company idea, that's the reason why I started and failed. It just came about through impulse and various inspirations.

People seem to romanticize this whole idea of you being an entrepreneur. "I'm going to make like 6 figures in a month! It's so great." Yah right. I'm grateful to have chatted with some fairly successful entrepreneurs, and **none of them have failed to explain how much work and time it took them.** That would be my advice. Never force an idea onto yourself, even if you're just a "student" trying to make it.

Now speaking in the context of what you were saying, I gave myself the space needed to take on this role. I was very comfortable with continuing on my pathway of studying, discovering internships, and working in new industries because, at that time, I knew I just needed to learn more. I didn't have a business to run. I didn't have anything going for me, so I stuck to learning and growing. **It was only when I realized there was an opportunity for success, a gap to be filled or a problem to be solved that I took action and made sacrifices.**

How did you balance your different roles as a club leader, co-founder, and entrepreneur?



Since high school, I had mastered the **80/20 rule**. I was able to prioritize what needed to be done to have that required amount of success for my growth. **That's a fancy way of saying that I knew the few most important tasks that were important at a given time to make me successful.** I'd essentially do this every week. I sometimes do this daily just to draw out all the things I need to do for each of the projects that I'm working on. At the time, I was running the PBSN External Affairs Portfolio, I was part of the USC, I was working part-time, studying, and helping run a couple of other things. To organize myself, I listed down the priorities for each activity and put my goals alongside them. **I get all nitty-gritty with an Excel sheet. It did me wonders!**

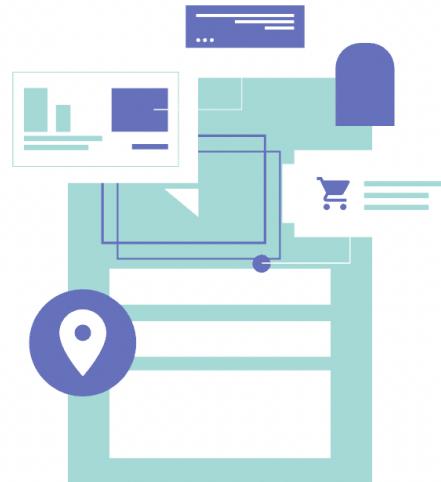
Put down what your goals are for each activity, and then put what needs to be done under a column. I prioritize each activity by timeline and dump it all in my calendar. I force myself to get it done whenever I need it to be done. I sometimes stayed up very late when my roommates were asleep, getting my work done. ***I'm grateful to have some loved ones help me out when things got rough.*** My mom would remind me to eat and my friend would remind me to take a break.

What I'd recommend for any student or person who's balancing many things is to try to test your boundaries. ***Test your capacity to do work, and the earlier you get it done, the more you understand how much you can do for the future.*** I tested my capacity back in high school, so I was very comfortable with doing all these things at once. I knew that I was okay with missing out on things or not going out sometimes. If you're in first-year, I recommend you start with two or three extracurriculars. See if you can balance it and then narrow down whatever activities you want to do for the second year based on how well you operate. ***There's a lot that's very instinctive and depends on how you get your work done. I don't think a single person can answer how you should juggle things.*** You eventually figure it out. That's basically how my whole second year went by. I told myself it would work out, and then I somehow got by.

Where do you see yourself in the future? What are some of your career prospects?

Hmm, if you're talking about 10 years from now, I can tell you that I want to be a person who has come into my element, whether that's one of two things.

Hopefully, by that time, I'll have come to succeed in my dream of running a tech business of my own, but you never know. Or second, I will be comfortable working in a product role. That's where I see myself in the next 5 to 10 years. On top of that, I'm also an aspiring digital nomad. I'm actually leaving for the UK next week, which is going to be good because I want to be working from around the world which is great. It's a month-long trip, but I'm very used to travelling a lot. I backpacked my Grade 11 year, so I was very used to just moving around independently. That's where I want to see myself. ***I want to make sure that I'm following my passion of just being out there and exploring the world.*** In a more literal sense of where I want to be, if I talk about my professional career, the first answer would be more appropriate.



What recommendations do you have for a young entrepreneur?

I think when you're young, you're very **afraid of taking that first step**, especially when you have an idea. For example, at Western, there are a lot of brilliant kids, with brilliant ideas, and unique skill sets. I see kids who don't come into their own when they have such amazing skills. Those kids who are doing so well in finance, doing so well in consulting, I hope for them to come into their own in terms of understanding what their passion is. **Be confident in your skillset, and secondly, don't be afraid of taking risks.** When you are in university, you have a lot more time. If you were to view the working environment in the real world, you realize a lot more serious responsibilities come about. When you're in university, you're able to take a lot more risks. I would say when you're younger, make all the mistakes you can. **Screw up all that you can.**

Make sure you also talk to a lot of entrepreneurs and other like-minded people. I think that's what helped me to start my entrepreneurial journey. I was networking with many people who were doing well out there, and they gave me advice. Now, this isn't about finding a mentor. **It's more so about truly learning from other people that you can sit down with and learn from.** You're a young entrepreneur or student from X university. You're able to get into people's DMs and set up a time to talk with them. Reach out to people and let them know that "I'm a university student who wants to start a project". **People are a lot more willing to talk to a student than a random person who's five years into the workforce.**

How do you balance social life with work life?

First of all, I'm a big family guy. **I love spending time with my family. I prioritize that.** I make sure that I cut off at least three hours after dinner and just chill with my family. Especially in the second year, I had to cut myself off from work after dinner. I wouldn't even touch my phone. I would just spend time with my family; we'd watch a movie together, watch a show or just talk. When you force yourself to block your time, you'll realize there are so many hours in a day for the things that matter.

In my calendar, I didn't allow myself to book a meeting from 7 to 10 and didn't touch my phone either. I was one of those people who I couldn't go without touching my phone, constantly checking my messages. Every five minutes I would open up my phone, check Instagram, and open every possible notification plus spam mail.



I had that **very bad habit of constantly checking my phone.** I put a time lock on my phone where it shuts down after 15 minutes on my socials. I had done that so I could force myself away from all that.

Otherwise, **connecting with friends is something important to me.** Sometimes even a quick FaceTime was great, I realized that I had a lot to vent about at work and just frustration. But, stepping away from my work and entering a social situation allowed for me to de-stress and get a reality check. I thankfully have surrounded myself with very mature friends who can recognize any frustration and have a conversation with me about it. If that's not how it's like, then maybe **try and refocus that energy somewhere else.** Sometimes maybe a social situation isn't what you need, potentially replace it with a hobby. It's essential for your mental health to understand when you need to take a break what you need to burn some of that stress off.
When you feel like you need a day or two, the world isn't going to burn because you're not there, so take that day or two. Take that day or two that you need to sit down and relax and have it for yourself, or have it with your friends and family.



A favourite quote to share with the W5 community:

“Any idea is the product of inspiration.”

Inspiration can come at any time, anywhere, any place. You'll be sitting at the dinner table eating some mac n cheese, and you'll think of the most revolutionary idea. This is something that can happen. Be ready to take note, of whatever you're thinking of. Our brains are fascinating, and our thoughts can sometimes unlock some of the craziest things at any time. That one-liner hits home every time for me because I'm the type of dude who'd be sitting in the middle of a conversation and just zone out for 10 minutes. The reason for being, I support my internal dialogue and the ideas that can come from it. Inspiration can come from anywhere, anytime and from anything.

Closing Remarks

Ali Malik is a **model entrepreneur** and student who displays an outstanding ability to **balance** his multiple priorities. His early experience in “brick and mortar” entrepreneurship coupled with his exemplary leadership skills have propelled him to be an excellent innovator in the tech space.

To summarize this issue of The Entrepreneur, we want to reiterate that your entrepreneurship journey can start at any time, anywhere. We hope you can keep in mind Ali’s insights along your journey.



1. **Simplify your decision-making process.** Whether it be a personal career goal or an entrepreneurial decision, simplify the decision and just decide whether or not to try it. The best decision is the one you make now with your best judgement.
2. **Accept the risk of failure.** Go into every challenge with the acceptance of the possibility of failure. Know that a loss today is always the opportunity to learn and guide you to continue on your path to success.
3. **Focus on prioritizing.** Ensure that you are clear on what you value most. Ask yourself the hard questions, and set firm boundaries to ensure that your values are protected even when the balance is hard to strike.

We would like to thank Ali Malik for sharing his experience and recommendations with The Entrepreneur and our readers. Be sure to download Surf at www.joinsurf.com! And follow Trufans at www.trufan.io for marketing related services.

The W5 team thanks you for reading this issue of The Entrepreneur. Get involved in W5 events and stay connected through our socials listed below:

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Please reach out if you have any questions, comments or thoughts!



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