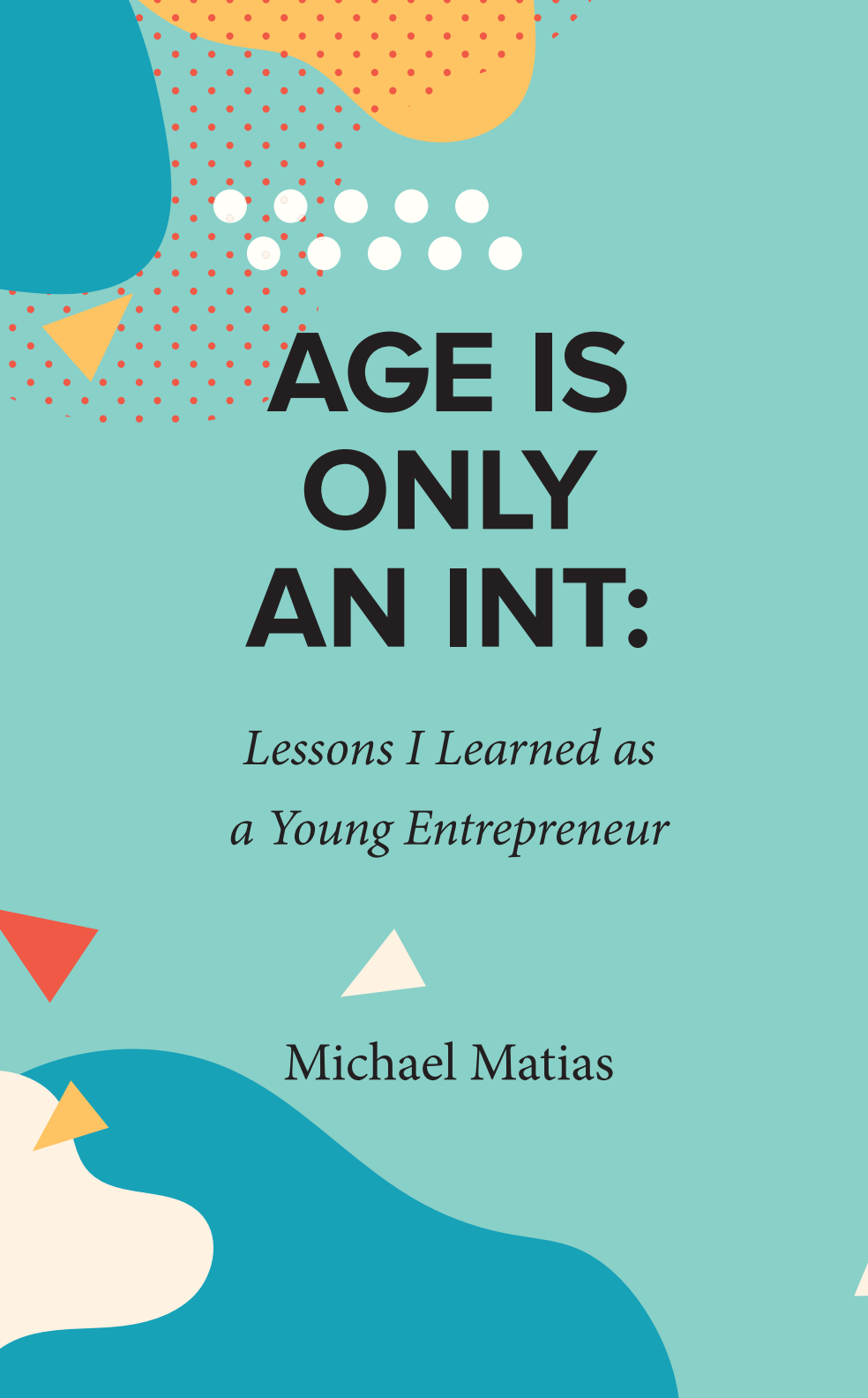




AGE IS ONLY AN INT:

*Lessons I Learned as
a Young Entrepreneur*

Michael Matias

*To my amazing nieces - Mai, Alma and Cora - may you
go through life with the confidence and excitement
that you can do anything you set your mind to.*



WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK



I have always been passionate about entrepreneurship and innovation, whether that means seeking change in my school or community, developing technology, or building a startup. These are often difficult things to do, and each comes with its own set of challenges. In my teen years I would often wonder if I was old enough to create meaningful change. In times of uncertainty, I often found it extremely helpful to learn about what others were doing, especially when I could get insight into their challenges, successes, and failures. I often sought advice from people across disciplines, trying to learn from their experiences while appreciating the ways their circumstances and situations might differ from mine. Part of growing up was realizing I was not alone in my ambitions and fears. There are so many teens out there who want to do things, or would want to do them if they felt they could try. When, as a teen, I founded the youth hackathon series Hacking Generation Y, I set out to introduce as many teens as possible to entrepreneurship culture and challenge them to expand their horizons. Years later, my goals remain the same. While busy at Stanford and working in Silicon Valley, I've devoted time each day to interviewing thought leaders and filming over 250 online episodes of a series I created *20 Minute Leaders*. I've done so with the hope that

valuable advice from CEOs and industry leaders will be heard by others on their entrepreneurial journeys. I have learned so much from these leaders, and I think many young people will find them just as inspiring. (Many of them have kindly shared their insights throughout these chapters.)

This book is yet another way I hope to encourage young audiences to explore the path of innovation and entrepreneurship. Through a series of very personal stories, I hope to share the experiences I've had and the lessons I've learned along the way—all of which were helpful to me as a young adult in my quest to effect change, innovate, and grow both as an entrepreneur and as a learner. These are experiences and lessons I hope to carry with me into my next stage of life.

We each come from different circumstances and backgrounds. For some, nurturing backgrounds have made it easier to access information and people. For others, the same access can be much more difficult to come by. I recognize that not all of my experiences and lessons will be relevant to all readers. However, if some of my stories and experiences prove helpful to even some readers—and these readers walk away feeling a bit more confident to explore their curiosities in effecting change in their surrounding, innovation and entrepreneurship—this book will have achieved its goal. This book is for the youth community everywhere.

To my readers: I hope that you find some of these lessons helpful, and I wish each of you well on your path towards innovation and entrepreneurship.

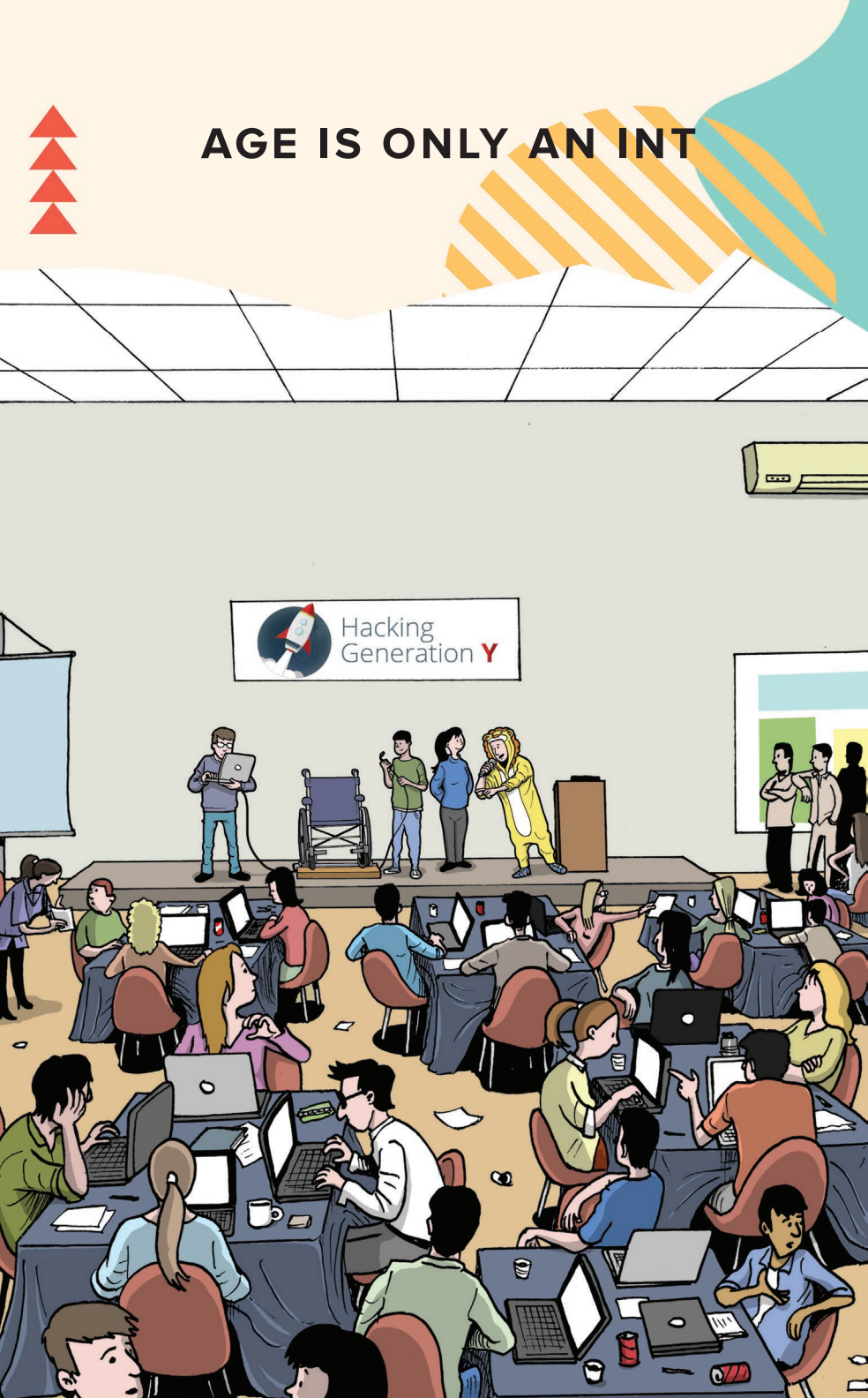


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AGE IS ONLY AN INT



“It’s hard to drive people where you want them to go, but if you can attract people who want to go to the same place that you’d like to go and remove obstacles, provide incentives, and get the right people belayed to each other, you can climb really high peaks.”

Joel Peterson, *Stanford GSB Professor; former Chairman of JetBlue Airways*

“I think coming into something FOB (fresh off the boat), inexperienced to an extent, and innocent allows you to do things that you would have never imagined.”

Dovi Frances, *Founding Partner, Group11*

“Keep dreaming, of course. In addition, be resilient in facing the duties that come with success in business and human relations. Every person who excels in anything commits time to that thing over others. And even with good management, the tasks will sometimes seem impossible to complete. In those times, resolutely completing even the mundane will make possible the transformative.”

Abraham D. Sofaer, *George P. Shultz Senior Fellow, The Hoover Institution, Stanford University*

“Build a market first and your product second. Find a problem and then make content about it: videos, emailing lists. Eventually your perfect product will come to fruition and by then customers will already be lined up to buy it.”

Cliff Weitzman, *CEO, Speechify*

“When a great team meets a lousy market, market wins.
When a lousy team meets a great market, market wins.
When a great team meets a great market, something special happens.”

Omer Perchik, *Founder and CEO, Any.do*

“Open the doors!” I yelled as a swarm of five hundred teenagers spilled into the high school auditorium. My last hackathon (a 30-hour coding marathon) was finally here: the culmination of a year of blood, sweat, and Monster energy drinks. And what was to follow was a weekend of pizza, animal onesies, new friendships, and radical new tech innovations that would impress even the most seasoned venture capitalists and entrepreneurs.

But before I tell you about that, let’s start from the beginning—13 hackathons ago. It started in September of 2014. I was still a teen and considered by many a techie and quite a skilled coder. I had just flown out to Silicon Valley to intern for Professor Dan Ariely, a leading researcher in behavioral economics and a best-selling author. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, and along with my work, I was looking to keep advancing my tech skills, so I applied to one of the biggest hackathons in the United States. My imagination was already running wild with anticipation when I got a letter back sooner than I expected. My application had not even been reviewed because I was a teen!

I was fuming. I have always lived my life defiant of the social norms that define who can do what and at what age: I spoke at an international conference at 14, and I founded my first startup at 17. I subscribe to the idea that the power to innovate is not given to only a few, but it’s open to anyone with a passion to take it. So I could think of absolutely no reason why I should be unable

to attend a hackathon for coders only a few years older than myself. If you have the passion and the skill, isn't age just a number?

That night, I called my close friend Rafael Cosman to share my frustrations. When we started discussing alternative plans, I found myself saying, "I don't let things happen *to* me. I need to create my own response." There was a moment of silence as he waited for me to share my next Michael project. Then, it jumped out.

"I'm creating my own hackathon. And it's going to be exclusively for teens." As soon as I said it, I knew it was exactly the right thing to do. Hackathons were not widespread at the time, and I was aware of only a few other hackathons for high schoolers in the entire United States.

"And what will you call it?" Rafael asked.

"Hacking Generation Y,"¹ I answered impulsively.

It turns out I was born right at the very end of Generation Y and was technically considered to also be a part of Generation Z. But be it Z or Y, all I knew was that I was too young to get into a hackathon. The second I had put my idea out into the world, I knew I had to bring it to fruition. I joined forces with my good friend Yonatan Oren, and we started getting to work.

We planned to host our event in the Palo Alto area, where we were currently living, even though as teens we had no real experience doing anything of the sort. How would we get funding? A venue? Judges? Applicants? Willing to do anything to get this off the ground, we tirelessly consulted with others who had made such

¹ In the context of Hackathons (and HackGeny), the word "Hack" is often used to refer to the act of finding creative solutions to real problems using technology, and implementing them in a short timespan.

events and spent long hours and late nights putting all the pieces together.

The first thing we made sure to do was build a story that was convincing. Because we were only high schoolers, we needed to make our event look as professional as possible if we were going to convince teens to fly across the country, or the world, to attend it. Before planning the specifics, Yonatan developed a website with a streamlined user interface and messaging system. That way, when we began marketing our event, it was clear we were an established and legitimate hackathon.

The consumer psychology behind this, we thought, was that we wanted to ensure we were not pitching ourselves, two teen boys, but rather the greater picture of what we were trying to accomplish: the creation of a technological space where age was just a number. Having presented ourselves, we posted on the *Hackathon Hackers* Facebook group, a popular site for teenagers engaged in tech, and opened a web-based application form for the event.

The application itself was quite extensive. We had an interesting tension to resolve: On the one hand, we (naturally) didn't want to judge the applicants based on their age or past experience, but on the other hand, we wanted to admit applicants who were most enthusiastic about attending. So, we asked the applicants for a few things. First, we requested their GitHub accounts, so we could check out their code. Next, we asked why they were passionate about coming to Hacking Generation Y. Did they just want to have fun and score free Chipotle, or did they have a genuine curiosity about exploring tech? Lastly, we had them share any ideas they might already have for projects they could develop during the

hackathon. This gave us a good sense of who was most determined to genuinely build something both innovative and sustainable.

In the second part of the application, we asked a bunch of questions: Are you more of a designer? An entrepreneur? A coder? Big thinker? We wanted to diversify the attendees as much as possible to ensure every team is well set to develop a fully functioning project.

These questions were by no means the only ones worth asking; they were all just questions that Yonatan and I thought up when we asked ourselves *what types of students* we wanted attending our event. Although we expected only a few dozen high schoolers to apply, we also made it clear on the application that only the most innovative and enthusiastic would be admitted. We wanted our hackathon to be of the highest standard, and we were not willing to accept people just so we had numbers.

Keeping that in mind, we decided it would be a safe bet to expect an event of fifty high schoolers, including the ones we'd invite from around the Palo Alto area. Hoping to hit our target, we borrowed a concept we noticed another hackathon was using: hackathon ambassadors. We further spread interest in our hackathon by setting up a program where high school students could function as "pro members" of the HackGenY team. We gave them perks like a nicer T-shirt at the event, a title as a co-organizer, and so on, and in return, they ensured the word of our hackathon would spread to high schools across America.

In the meantime, to keep our confidence up, we also utilized something Eric Ries discusses in his book *Lean Startup*: celebrating small victories. The concept is

that if you take a moment to pause on your successes, no matter how small, you will not only increase your own self-confidence but also your confidence in your startup's potential. Yonatan and I decided to do this by having our website send us an email every time someone submitted an application form.

Much to our surprise, the emails kept coming, and when the applications online closed, we woke up Monday morning to find out we had *1,200 high school* applicants hoping to come in from all around the world! It immediately became clear we were creating something much bigger than ourselves. We were also, however, quickly faced with two big problems: how to accept the group of teens who would actually attend the event and how to fund an event that would surely be quite expensive.

Yonatan and I decided to stick to the promised timeline and admit attendees first, before securing the funding for the event (slightly risky, I know). As we began reading the applications, we agreed we were looking for passion, drive, and coding skills, or at least an expressed excitement to learn them. We scanned through hundreds of applications, calling out to each other across the table when we found someone remarkable. Finally, thanks to a couple of all-nighters and countless Chinese food takeout orders, we ended up accepting about 500 students.

Now, we faced our second problem. We needed money to accommodate all these teens, and we needed endless organizational capabilities. So, we began speaking with potential sponsors. By demonstrating that we had extreme interest in our event (with proof of some 500 accepted student attendees) we were able to secure the Peter Thiel Foundation, then Andreessen Horowitz.

Finally, by our tenth sponsor, they began approaching us! Quickly, we gained thirty-two secured sponsorships and tens of thousands of dollars in funding. We had taken a huge leap of faith in believing that we would be able to fund an event that hundreds of students were eager to attend, but it paid off: Our hackathon was officially happening.

To help us with the sponsorships, Yonatan and I partnered with a nonprofit aimed at supporting hackathons in the United States. Not only were they able to assist us with handling our finances, but they also served as incredible mentors throughout the event. It would be a disservice to the story to not mention all of the hard work they contributed.

Thanks to our now-secured funding, we were able to provide travel refunds for one hundred students (two dozen of whom were coming from India, Israel, Australia, France, Italy, Germany, and everywhere in between).

We were able to anticipate our attendees' needs so well, and earn sponsors' trust in our leadership, largely because we were the same age as the kids we were marketing to. This taught me an important lesson: If you know your market well, it will be significantly easier to find success. That doesn't mean we executed without flaws. One night, we accidentally sent out 100 emails to a mailing list of kids we had *already confirmed* would be receiving travel aid. The email said that we would not be able to provide travel compensation for these attendees. Yikes. We quickly fixed the issue, but it was a perfect example of how every entrepreneurial endeavor is a constant seesaw between victories and mess-ups.

In many ways, however, this was the magic of what we were doing: completely learning on the job. As entrepreneurs, especially young ones, we had no clue what to expect from our journey of building a hackathon. We did everything by trial and error, inventing our *own* idea of what a *Shark Tank*-style hackathon should look like. But what could be more fun than that? We got to make the rules, and then, if they didn't work out, we got to break them. We learned quickly never to be afraid to try something just because we hadn't done it before, and hey, sometimes it even worked out better that way. But enough life lessons; let's get back to our story.

As the weekend of the hackathon approached, we arranged our event space to be NestGSV (renting a huge space for a weekend function is not easy for teenagers, believe me), and secured judges and mentors from the biggest innovators like Facebook and Google. We literally visited the offices of dozens of them, personally pitching to them why they should come and devote their scarce weekend time to mentoring students and judging at the hackathon. We also invited sponsors from around the Bay Area to set up booths at the event and showcase their new technologies, made our slogan "Age is Only an Int" (int is a commonly used term in coding, depicting a shorthand for integer, or a whole number), and ordered 2,000 Chipotle burritos. It was time to welcome the teens.

Before I continue with this story, I think it might be helpful to walk you through how a hackathon feels, from start to finish. The journey begins on the bus: countless kids crammed in, waiting to burst out and sprint toward the auditorium doors. Everyone is already starting to scream:

“Hi! Where are you from?! That’s so cool! Do you code mostly?”

“No way! C++ is my favorite language, too! Maybe we could work on something together?”

“I also want to do an app for social good!! I have this idea called BetterWorld ...”

And so on. When the bus finally pulls up to the venue, everyone piles out and pours into the street. When the doors of the venue finally open, it’s like a bag of sand that’s just been slashed. Hundreds of kids swarm the venue. As I approach the stage in a lion onesie, everyone gathers around for cheers and welcoming songs. Everyone is dancing and singing and bursting at the seams with energy.

From there, you might head to a workshop or mini-lecture with renowned figures from the tech scene or a Google engineer. You sit in a chair only a few steps away from the brightest and biggest names in tech. Then, grabbing your backpack, you head to another lecture or to one of the sponsor booths, where you’re able to test-run some of their newest technology. Companies like Muse Meditation, Pebble Watches, and others bring their latest products to test their APIs and integrations as well as to give teens the chance to help develop them. After tinkering with those, you go back to the main room, where you find a team to start building your own project with.

The tables are completely carpeted with wires, and you duck from a drone that almost clips you as it zooms by. In one corner, a boy plays a handheld piano, while his coding partner programs something rapidly on the computer. Though you can’t always be sure what’s going on at the table next to you, even just *thinking* about what

each of the groups around you is creating is inspiring. You sit down, grab some chips, and start ideating with a couple of kids from around the world.

Halfway through mapping out the user interface for your app, someone screams, “MACARENA!”

You jump up and everyone starts doing the Macarena around the room. This, naturally, turns into a conga line, and when you get to the other half of the venue space, you slip out of the coordinated dance to take a peek at some other projects. One team is building an app called Transponder.

The team brings together kids from Guatemala, Oklahoma, and New York City. Maria, the girl from Guatemala, explains she got the idea for Transponder because when she was living alone in the Bay Area, her parents wanted a way to make sure she was safe when she went out. The general premise of Transponder is that it is “a safety iPhone application ..., which can be used when heading into unsafe or unknown areas. Transponder checks in with the user via a text message every 30 minutes. Users reply to the text to confirm their safety, but if no reply arrives within a predetermined amount of time, Transponder uses the phone’s last known location to alert emergency contacts and local police agencies.” Whoa.

Another team is working on something that can only be described as a hot pink version of Google Glass. Yet another team is working with an Oculus headset. You hop back in the conga line and make your way back to your table.

One person in your team says they just graduated from a Microsoft boot camp and that they can start working on the website for your app. Another says they

volunteered at an orphanage in India the summer before and would be happy to start working through the intricacies of how your app can be utilized for social good. Another person yells: “BURRITO TIME!”

Thousands of Chipotle burritos start raining from the skies, and kids start diving on the floor to claim their warm, silver parcels. Everyone is laughing, coding, eating, and dancing. It really is a party. Once you’ve done your preplanning and you’ve decided on your idea, you begin developing your minimum viable product (MVP), or working model of the application.

This, of course, is interspersed with more talks from lead developers and entrepreneurs, cat videos someone has hijacked the big screen to play, and endless chocolate ice cream.

When the time comes to add more features to your application, you merge with the group next to you, learn all about their idea, and feel even more inspired than before. Finally, after a weekend of no sleep, everyone drops their backpacks and gets ready to present.

You head to the stage because your group has been chosen as one of the top ten, and you pitch, *Shark Tank*-style, to a board of venture capitalists and tech industry leaders. When it’s all said and done, whether you win doesn’t even matter. You’ve had the experience of a lifetime and are taking with you a new intrinsic *need* to create: an itching desire that you won’t be able to shake.

The stunning thing about the hackathon, too, is that every student experiences it differently. For some, coming from schools where computer science classes were like unicorns, it was their first opportunity to be with other like-minded engineers. For others, it was simply a high-speed weekend of geeky fun. For another

group, it turned out to be a job opportunity. One of our winners, who was 14 at the time, had creatively reverse-engineered Tinder and, as a result, was offered a full-time position at one of the leading companies that came to judge the event. (He rejected it, because he had already dropped out of high school to work on another startup.)

There was something for everyone. If you walked around, you would find a group of kids discussing *Game of Thrones*, and then you could turn around to find three teens playing *Settlers of Catan*. After passing a couple of booths of app development projects, you might think you have a general idea of what is going on—but then you'd run headfirst into a team all wearing pink cowboy hats and debating how to best execute a pixel-perfect design project. Regardless of what the varied experience of each hackathon attendee was, it did not take long for Yonatan and me to realize we had created something greater than we ever could have imagined. And the judges hadn't even judged the final presentations yet.

My favorite team, who came in third place, was called HandyHacked. Taking to the stage with a wheelchair, a computer mouse, and a VR headset, they explained they had engineered a walking simulation device for paraplegic patients. (Did I mention this was a team of 14-year-olds?) By utilizing two optic mouse inputs in the virtual reality headset, HandyHacked allowed the user to move about the virtual environment based on where he “wheeled” himself. During the demo, they pulled an audience member up on stage and had him test it. His facial expressions of shock and excitement said it all.

It was incredible to see such young kids noticing problems in their lives, discussing how to solve them, and

then working together with other teenagers to build the solution with their own two hands. During the pitches, I remember looking at Yonatan in excitement and awe. Our blood might have been purely caffeine at this point, but that didn't matter. The energy around us was palpable to everyone.

It was also a great personal experience, with seven of the attendees being good friends of mine who are active in the tech community in Israel. They slept on the floor of my apartment, and we toured the biggest companies and startups in the Valley together. It gave me so much pride and joy to be able to do what I love alongside my friends. But outside of sharing the hackathon with them, Yonatan and I both knew we had made an impact far beyond our immediate reach. Not only were we able to help about 500 teens from around the world recognize their own inner hacker, but we were able to prove to the world that age has no place in restricting what a young entrepreneur can accomplish. You don't need to be over 18 to help solve a problem or make strides in your field. There is no age too early to start tinkering and hacking away at problems in front of you.

And this message spread. A few days after the event, I received an email from a teen named Jadan Johnson, who lived in Jamaica. He had seen what we did in Palo Alto and wanted to bring such a hackathon to his community which had limited technology and entrepreneurship culture.

Wow, I thought. *There might be an entire world of teenagers out there who could learn and grow from Hacking Generation Y. This doesn't have to just be a one-time thing.* I couldn't wait to expand our mission. As an entrepreneur, however, before I got ahead of myself, I wanted to

make sure there was product market validation. In other words, I needed to demonstrate to myself that Hacking Generation Y's success was more than a matter of luck: High school hackathons were broadly and presently *needed*.

What I came to realize upon reflection was that the first hackathon had given me such validation in three ways. First, from the sheer amount of high school students who applied to the initial event (there were plenty of students excited to sign up). Second, from the 40 sponsors and top Silicon Valley executives who not only contributed dozens of thousands of dollars in funding, but whose engineers also volunteered, without being paid, to offer a weekend of mentorship. And third, the greatest validation of all: The fact that someone I had never spoken to was coming to me and saying there was a demand for what I had to offer.

So I said to myself, *OK, if I'm going to do this, then I'm going to do this right*. I'll get organized and create a proper organization out of what I've learned from our Palo Alto hackathon. I'll help get a hackathon going in Jamaica, and if it works out, we won't stop there. To do this, however, I didn't hop on the next plane to Jamaica. Instead, I established something I called the "hackathon in a box." Essentially, I created a Google Drive filled to the brim with everything a teenager would need to create their own Hacking Generation Y hackathon. For the technology side of the event, I included written how-tos on recruiting qualified judges from the tech sector, slides on how to give newbie coders crash courses in Python or Swift, and various open software download links that hackathon-goers could use to build their ideas. I even spotlighted some of the previous hackathon-winning

projects, detailing how their process from ideation to beta testing was conducted. For the logistical side of the event, I compiled all of the application forms, the travel reimbursement forms, the logos, the marketing emails, and the sponsorship emails, as well as anything else I could think of that was needed to build a hackathon from the ground up.

The first “box” was sent to Jadan in Jamaica. I told him I was there to support him in any way I could, but that he had my blessing, and the best way to learn was to make big decisions on his own. Well, two months later, Jadan got back to me: Hacking Generation Y Jamaica was a massive success. So, as promised, we kept going. We did Hacking Generation Y India, London, Tel Aviv, and so on. We put on 13 hackathons in five countries in all. In fact, I finally met the leader of Hacking Generation Y India for the first time on the Stanford campus this fall. Originally thousands of miles away and only connected by a shared love for tech, we found ourselves reconnected in Palo Alto, both ready to study computer science.

The thing I liked most about the hackathon in a box was that it broke any geographical barriers preventing kids from around the world from creating and participating in hackathons. The tools and resources I created were sent out instantaneously across thousands of miles, cultures, and borders, to provide the foundation for something more seamless and far-reaching than I ever could make had I tried to personally construct each hackathon on site. What’s more, each one of these hackathons, an event of massive corporate scale that would typically take teams of adults months to organize, were sprouting up all over the globe—and led by teenagers. By the end of Hacking Generation Y’s lifespan, it had

touched thousands of youth attendees' lives. For a group of young and ambitious kids to be able to create such large-scale events underscored what my hackathon rejection had inspired me to show: that age should never hold anyone back from chasing their passions.

Almost exactly a year after its founding, I found myself gearing up for Hacking Generation Y's last hackathon I would personally lead. At this point, I was enlisted in the Israeli Defense Forces, so the grand finale was set to occur in Tel Aviv. The event would host 500 teenagers in my old high school gym. High school had been such an incredible and formative experience for me both as a techie and as a person, so this seemed like the perfect place to end my youth hackathon journey. This time, my team and I had it down to a science. We raised more than \$40,000 in sponsorship money, which I believe might have qualified us as the most well-funded hackathon Israel had ever seen for any age group at that time. I could not have been more excited.

In the weeks leading up to the event, nothing went unchecked. We meticulously planned everything down to the tiniest detail. This high-level planning was necessary because essentially we were being tasked with transforming this high school gym which was ill-equipped for such events into one of the greatest technological hubs of Israel in one weekend. This meant switching out basketball hoops for mega-monitors and carts of squishy dodgeballs for state-of-the-art hardware materials the students could use for their projects. We had to rewire, relight, and rework every square inch of the space. On top of that, because it was a school, there were endless issues regarding insurance, liability, and about every other possible legal issue you can imagine.

But some way or another, and not without many bumps along the road (but that's for another story), we made it to the moment we'd been waiting for.

"Open the doors!" we all screamed in unison. We had done it. All my friends and family, along with many others from the Start-up Nation (what Israel is often called for its entrepreneurial core), filled the auditorium for 30 hours. It was the greatest celebration of entrepreneurship and engineering I had ever seen.

Like that first hackathon, it was a downright party. Kids would shout "CODING BREAK!" and run to the middle of the gym for a dance party.

I was standing on a bench in the middle of the room and shouting out different burrito fillings, throwing them across the room to be expertly caught by the next hungry coder. Kids were using Sharpies to mark up their beta products one minute and drawing mustaches on each other the next. All the while, there was an immense amount of innovation and creativity being poured into mind-blowing projects. Kids passed out on the floor from exerting so much energy while their teammates brought their projects to the next checkpoint. Ice-cream-sticky hands were coding rapidly on computers, and teammates were scrambling to solve the world's problems within the ten remaining hours of our weekend.

With every hackathon, no matter where in the world it was, there was always that unique and raw curiosity saturating the room. Everyone could *feel* it. It was the terrifying and stunning result of entering the unknown and diving headfirst into a project you knew you only had one weekend to create. The best part of all was that there in that one conference room, be it in India or Tel

Aviv, there were hundreds of other teenagers ready to dive in with you.

The final hackathon also served as a beautiful reflection on the work we had done. We had partnered with eBay and Wix for massive events, had global sponsors, and touched thousands of teenagers from around the world with the spirit of innovation. But my musing over our hard work came with a bittersweet realization: At that final hackathon, I knew I would not be able to run Hacking Generation Y any longer. I had been conscripted into the Elite Technological Unit of the Israeli Defense Forces, and I needed to focus on serving my country. I knew if I didn't dedicate myself wholly to military service, I would regret it. So, at the closing of that weekend, I said goodbye to my roller coaster of a year with Hacking Generation Y. I left with a hope and belief in my heart that—now that so many teens all over the world had gotten the taste of hackathons and others saw there is such potential in teens—this was just the beginning of what would become a new norm.

Reflecting back on those adventures, I can't help but feel most grateful for the connections I was able to make with my co-organizers. Every hackathon was a unique party, with groups of volunteers, friends, and family members coming together to messily yet meticulously build a coding competition from scratch. No one had to be an official employee of Hacking Generation Y to get involved—they just had to have a passion for late nights and bringing the world of coding to young high schoolers (and maybe a passion for animal onesies as well).

And it was because of our commitment to bringing excited new members on board that I met some incredible people who would soon become my best friends.

First, I met Dan Chaitas. Dan reached out to me because he had heard me speak about Hacking Generation Y in an interview. He emailed me asking if he could help us with marketing, and I immediately welcomed him onto the team. About a month after we got to know each other, the two of us flew to Amsterdam to compete in a hackathon together.

We traveled around, took notes on how the hackathon was operating, got to know new potential sponsors, and started thinking about conducting a teen hackathon in Amsterdam. The entire trip was full of high-energy conversations and drop-everything-and-go adventures where we would run to see a potential hackathon venue and then leave halfway through viewing it to go meet with a potential sponsor. Trips like these always encapsulated what was so special about being a teenage entrepreneur: building inspiring events from scratch with your best friends and learning how to do everything yourself.

For the final hackathon, I teamed up with a group of close friends (which seemed ever-expanding), including Mickey Haslavsky, Iddo Gino, Shir Rajuan, Waverly Harden, and others. We wanted to put on the mother of all hackathons. I think one of the greatest lessons anyone can learn throughout their life is just how important our connections with others are. I certainly would not be where I am today if I had not gotten all of the energy and support from my friends that I did, and I truly cannot give them enough credit.

Even outside of what I gained personally from being surrounded by my close friends, there were incredible business benefits from having such an intelligent and motivated team. Iddo and Mickey met through Hacking

Generation Y, and a couple of years later, Iddo asked Mickey to join him as a cofounder of his company, RapidAPI. That same company would go on to become the world's largest application programming interface (API) marketplace where millions of developers can connect to thousands of APIs. It's truly incredible what can happen if you put inspired minds together, and I have no doubt many of us will work together on even greater projects in the future.

There were also many others who played significant roles in forming these experiences: Danish Shaik, Kamesh Vedula, Rishi Dhanaraj, Justin Ezor, and Keshav Rao, to name only a few. But there were simply too many fantastic contributors to possibly list them all here, each selflessly giving their time and energy to Hacking Generation Y so kids like them could learn and explore the world of tech.

We were particularly touched by the many industry leaders who volunteered their time to help the youth attendees in so many ways, from driving sponsorships to attending the event as mentors, speakers, and judges. These included industry giants like Dov Moran from Grove Ventures, Chris Dibona from Google, and Professor Orit Hazzan from the Technion.² Some were personal mentors from past experiences in my life, such as MIT Launch, and others became mentors for years to come. I cannot thank them enough.

There was one figure who truly brought something uniquely powerful to Hacking Generation Y from its

² There were dozens more that came to help judge and mentor throughout the events, and it would be impossible to list them all here. They appear in the HackgenY website, Hackgeny.com. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

start: Justin Brezhnev, the Executive Director of Hacker Fund.³

Justin came on to our team to support HackGenY as a mentor and a partner, bringing with him expert mentors, event staff support, hardware to experiment with, and a huge amount of morale. His assistance and guidance throughout the process were truly invaluable, and I want to extend my deepest gratitude for all he did for the project. As we were working together, it also quickly became apparent that he was one of the most energetic, most excited people I'd ever met. He brought a certain vibrancy to every interaction he had, and when it came time for our first hackathon in Silicon Valley, he brought a gift for the entire event to enjoy.

When he arrived, he ran inside in an animal onesie. Right before the opening ceremony, he jumped up and down on the stage and asked if he could help bring everyone's energy up. Without a pause, Justin ran to the front of the stage and shouted: "EVERYBODY SCREAM AFTER ME!"

The whole audience looked up at him.

"I!" Justin shouted.

Everyone repeated, "I!"

"I BELIEVE!"

"I BELIEVE!"

"I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL HACK!"

"I BELIEVE THAT WE WILL HACK!"

³ Hacker Fund is a nonprofit that is dedicated to empowering technologists to create social change. At the time, the organization was supported by their fiscal sponsor, StudentRND which is a 501(c)(3) public charity whose mission is to make students fall in love with coding. Hacker Fund was responsible for recruiting a collegiate mentor force for high school hackathons in order to foster the understanding that hackathons are more about the relationships that are built than the code that is written.

Soon, everyone in the crowd was screaming at the top of their lungs. The kids were going absolutely nuts, and any onlooker would have thought we were in the craziest rave of all time—but we were really just a ton of teenagers excited to code. To show us how to turn something technical and silent into a full-blown party was one of the many great gifts Justin gave our team. I quickly made it a tradition to wear an animal onesie to every hackathon and kick every event off with a chant.

But for all of the incredible memories I formed with friends over Hacking Generation Y, memories for which I feel grateful, there were also incredible memories that attendees brought with them. I can't tell you how many emails I received over the following years from managers at companies telling me their new employee came to work wearing a HackGenY t-shirt. People are proud to show their HackGenY pride and even more proud when someone asks them about their experience. Just a few months ago, I met a software engineer at Google who told me he had decided to study computer science after participating in the Hacking Generation Y hackathon in Tel Aviv.

And that's only one of many stories I've heard from attendees whose experience at the hackathon led them to study computer science and STEM fields. This was particularly the case for some of the young women our hackathon recruited to attend. In the technology sector, women are often highly underrepresented. To do our part in helping level out the playing field for women in tech, we specifically reached out to high school girls to participate in the hackathon, and we were able to increase young women's attendance by covering their travel expenses thanks to a grant from Google. Maggie

Johnson, the vice president of Education and University Programs at Google, a strong champion to bringing more women into tech and to youth tech education in general, said in a press release for the hackathon, “The Hacking Generation Y Hackathon is a great opportunity for high school students to come together and use their design and programming skills not only to build some great applications, but also to build relationships and teams that go beyond the event—that’s the most important part.”⁴

When we set up the application process, we made it clear we had retained special sponsorship to help with travel expenses in order to encourage more participation by girls. It worked. I still remember the three girls who drove from Santa Barbara telling me how the extra help made it easier to decide to participate.

Later, I would come across articles from women in tech that detailed how the HackGenY hackathons they attended as high schoolers gave them a space where they felt valued and listened to.

One Hacking Generation Y alum, Amy Sorto, wrote later that year: “In my community, computer science is a topic that no one speaks about. I never heard anything about computer science, coding, or anything related to technology ... [until] my first hackathon ... Hacking Generation Y in California, across the country. I took a leap of faith and boarded the plane alone, which is one of the best decisions I have ever made.”⁵

After continuing an incredible journey in computer science, she is now a software engineer at Google. For

4 “HackGenY Press Release.” Hacking Generation Y, 10 Apr. 2015.

5 Sorto, Amy. “Hello, World.” *Hack Club*, Medium, 9 Sept. 29, 2015, <https://medium.com/hack-edu/hello-world-260622c9352a>.

me, to simply stumble across articles like this was monumental. It put our entire hackathon-production experience into perspective, and it helped me realize just how important our mission was. The hackathons our team hosted gave teenagers the platform to discover an entirely new passion within themselves. It opened up new worlds for them and created opportunities, which was our goal from the beginning.

But perhaps most of all, I feel proudest of the impact the hackathon had on the group that holds a special place in my heart: the 50 attending students from East Palo Alto. About a week before the hackathon, I looked over our list of attendees, excited about the great talent we attracted from all over the world. It suddenly occurred to me there were many teens who would not even be aware of opportunities such as this, including teens in nearby neighborhoods. I called the East Palo Alto high school and asked to meet with students in their computer science class.

Pitching the hackathon to the East Palo Alto students was a hard sell. Making a 30-hour coding marathon sound appealing to the students wasn't easy: many were far away from the tech scene and had never owned laptops. "It's like a party," I said when I came into their classrooms and invited them to come. "Free food, awesome merchandise, cool teenagers. And we promise you will have mentors to help you if you need them. Yes, you will be surrounded by experienced coding nerds who might intimidate you. But you are no less capable: You just don't know it yet. Give yourself a chance." Dozens of skeptic faces stared back at me. I wondered if I'd unwittingly started speaking in Java. "Just trust me," I promised. "Please come."

We paid for a bus to pick up however few students (if any) from East Palo Alto I'd managed to entice. I prepared 20 loaner laptops in advance—a number I found almost naively optimistic—but when 50 students boarded the bus on the day of the hackathon, I was beyond thrilled (albeit a bit stressed out as I frantically sourced more loaner laptops). I paired them with teams of seasoned “geeks,” and one programming workshop later, they joined the throng of some 500 intercontinental coders.

My father, who had worked in tech for many years and came by several times to visit the hackathon over the weekend, was incredibly emotional. He was telling me how impressed he was with the projects done by the students from the East Palo Alto high school and how he heard from a few of them how they were now planning to take additional coding classes over the summer. My mother, who did not know what a hackathon was and came to the event out of sheer curiosity, walked around wide-eyed and spoke to these students during the 30-hour marathon. Many of them told her they had gained newfound confidence in themselves and that they wanted to study computer science in college because of what they had learned that weekend. To me, all of these stories were the best measures of success I could have hoped for.

I never expected to be rewarded for this work in any way. It was surprising and humbling to receive a call a year after the last HackGenY hackathon to hear that, because of my work, I was included in *Forbes Israel's* “30 Under 30” list—though, of course, the most important reward remained knowing of the impact this initiative had on so many teens—which was more than I could ever have dreamed of.

I learned a life lesson from this. Even a teenager can do things and make a big difference to many others. Yes, it will take hard work, and yes, you'll need at least a few teammates and a whole lot of determination. But it is possible. Through a combination of trial and error, leaps of faith, and a deep motivation to bring your passion to others, it is possible, no matter how old you are. It turns out that age is only an int after all.

STARTUPS IN HIGH SCHOOL



“The training I got in investment banking was excellent, but there was something about being an entrepreneur that was liberating, and that was a great experience that I think I really wanted to have.”

Mark Schwartz, *Former Board Member, Starbucks Coffee*

“When you concentrate on building the business, ensure you have a path to be number one in the market and that you have a strong vision to stay there.

Benny Czarny, *CEO and Founder, OPSWAT, Inc.*

“Starting Sentrigo taught me a life lesson about engineering: Hard problems are interesting, but you need to build something that the customer actually wants and is easy to sell and market.”

Slavik Markovich, *Senior Vice President Product, Demisto, Palo Alto Networks*

“Smart people learn from mistakes. Really smart people patent them.”

Mel Rosenberg, *Ph.D. Head, Keter Center for Innovation, Shenkar College, Israel; Co-Founder, Ourboox.com*

“A product is not a technology or an idea. It’s a solution to a customer’s needs. Be open minded, and don’t come up with an already built-in solution. Make adjustments to your customer’s needs and focus on understanding your customer’s challenges so in the end you will build an outstanding solution for those specific requirements.”

Gadi Mikles, *Innovation and Research Product Leader, eBay; senior lecturer and an entrepreneurship advisor*

“Michael,” my mom said one afternoon, “I think you should have a look at this.”

I somewhat reluctantly turned away from rehearsing my lines for the school musical and walked over to my mom’s desk. She turned her computer.

“You should apply.”

On the screen, I saw the application page for a high school summer program: MIT Launch. It was the first program of its kind, and the idea was ambitious yet simple: to bring together 30 entrepreneurial teens from around the world and teach them how to build startups from the ground up. And, of course, do it at MIT.

At the time, I had just started 11th grade and had recently been asked by my school to sign a contract stating that I would reduce the number of clubs I was leading (kind of flattering, but nonetheless frustrating for someone like me, who thrives off of being busy). So, determined to show my school that robotics, Model United Nations, a cappella, my school’s band, and musicals would not be enough to satisfy my curiosity, I decided to apply—it sounded like an amazing program that could greatly expand my entrepreneurial toolkit.

The application process was grueling. I spent weeks preparing teacher recommendations, writing essays, and answering technical questions on phone interviews. The program promised it was just as difficult to get into as MIT itself. *Great*. As soon as I sent out my final essay, I sat in anticipation for weeks. Finally, on April 6, I got my long-awaited letter of admission. It’s safe to say I

absolutely lost it. Beyond excited, I began planning for my summer at MIT.

When my plane touched down in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I could hardly wait. I took a bus to campus and unpacked my things in my room. For the next four weeks, I would live alongside 29 of the most enthusiastic teen entrepreneurs in the famous (albeit slightly musty) MIT dorms. An hour or so after settling in, I was in the hallway joking with a couple of new friends about how none of us had prepared the “elevator pitch” we were told we would present on the second day of the program! As we were getting to know each other, the program managers told us to come to the common room of the dorm for an orientation activity.

All 30 of us piled into the room. Once we all sat down, one of the instructors walked to the front.

“Welcome to MIT Launch!” he shouted. “We are all incredibly excited to have you here. In order to kick off the program, we wanted to give you all a bit of a surprise.”

We all smiled nervously, half of us anticipating we’d get ice cream, the other half anticipating we’d have to cold-call Elon Musk. What he said was even more terrifying:

“I’m in an elevator. I’m an associate at McKinsey (true, by the way), and Alyssa”—he motioned to a girl close to him—“Alyssa has just entered the elevator with me.”

Alyssa nervously stood up and walked toward Martin, the instructor.

“Give me your pitch,” he said. Alyssa quickly whipped out an impressive 60-second spiel. Watching her, I was profusely sweating.

This was supposed to be a problem for the *second* day! I quickly pulled out my phone, hoping no one would see it, and started typing out the pitch for a product I hadn’t

even thought of yet. Kids around me started doing the same. It was a silent, panicked, pitch-writing frenzy.

I'll give you the ending before your imagination runs wild: My pitch went fine. Not great, but fine. I think it was about a state-of-the-art toothbrush or something, but whatever it was wasn't important. What *was* important was the lesson I learned in that moment. In entrepreneurship, there's planning, and there are surprises. You can ideate and prototype to your heart's content, but the universe may just laugh at your plans. It was Mike Tyson who said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth," and the most successful entrepreneurs are excited by the fight—even if they lose a couple of teeth along the way.

The terrifying but important pitch incident was only the beginning of what I'd learn that summer, however. After that, we were quickly paired with the team who would become our co-founders for the duration of the program. The organizers of the program had assembled the teams based on personality tests we had sent in a couple of weeks prior to coming to Cambridge. To me, this illustrated just how critical collaboration and teamwork are to the foundation of a successful startup. If MIT lecturers thought the best way to optimize startup teams' results was to put the groups together based on compatibility, I was willing to buy into it. Turns out, this was true.

My co-founders were Drew Bent from Palo Alto and Nadine Shaalan from New York. We quickly got to discussing what problems we noticed in the world around us, as we agreed this would be the best way to ensure our project met a real demand. We noticed that in our daily lives all three of us had experienced some difficulty

finding suitable restaurant choices based on various dietary restrictions. At the time, my mother was on a strict diet and couldn't eat out with us because waiters and restaurants could rarely tell her confidently what was in the food. Drew had recently become vegetarian and knew the issue intimately. Lastly, Nadine, following her dietary practices, could rarely find halal-friendly restaurants. And all of us knew kids from school with diabetes who could never go out with us for meals. It was 2013. There was hardly any readily available information out there.

So the three of us set out to create technology that could help people with dietary restrictions find suitable food at restaurants. Every day, in the cracks of time between our full schedule of lectures from MIT Sloan and Harvard Business school professors, we brainstormed how we could establish our product. With funding provided by the program, we set about conducting market research and started developing a mobile app. We ran around the streets of Cambridge, knocking on the doors of restaurants and meeting with about 100 managers in order to pitch our product and learn more about their menu items. We even printed stickers for the restaurants that partnered with us that detailed what dietary restrictions they supported (i.e. "We are gluten-free friendly"). Four years later, when I went to visit a friend at Harvard, I even saw one of these stickers still on a restaurant window!

With the help of program mentors (some of whom are venture capital associates I now share deals with!) and our newfound knowledge from the lectures, we created our finished product, AnyMeal: an app-based platform that provides comprehensive dietary information about specific restaurant dishes straight from restaurant

managers and chefs. We were proud of our startup, but our work didn't end there. By the end of the program, we had the opportunity to deliver a pitch to real venture capitalists.

It was monumental for us to put on suits and stand in front of a room full of entrepreneurs and VCs. Here were some of the brightest and best minds of business and tech listening to *us* and, more importantly, *our ideas*. Toward the end of our pitch, we explained our estimates for a sustainable and rapid growth model: "Eight hundred new restaurants putting their detailed dietary information on our app a month," we said, grinning, as we flipped to the last slide in our pitch deck. The slide read:

"HELP US CHANGE HOW WE EAT."

I closed out the pitch with a small speech about how we had proven our product in Cambridge and were prepared to take it worldwide. To some adults, three high schoolers pitching a company they want to take global might seem ridiculous, but to us, it felt like a reality. We left the auditorium inspired.

The entire experience made us realize that what we were doing had a future well beyond the end of the summer. Though Nadine did not continue with us, Drew and I began excitedly planning how we could take our company to the next level.¹ Drew, who had interned for Sal Khan of Khan Academy (at 16!), was the best business partner I could have asked for. He is a brilliant engineer and one of the smartest people I've ever met, so I was thrilled to start this journey with him.

¹ Nadine later went on to complete Computer Science studies at Northeastern University.

We knew we needed a bit more help, so we onboarded another member from MIT Launch, Ben Latz, onto our team. Unsure of what might happen, but determined to work hard, the three of us—all 17 years old and living in different time zones—entered into a yearlong journey that would change our lives.

When I returned to Tel Aviv at the end of the summer, it was time to hit the ground running. Because each of us had relatively little experience with entrepreneurship, one of the main lessons we mastered was how to learn by doing.

Ben, who became our lead designer at AnyMeal, can attest to this. The first design he made for AnyMeal was, well, less than perfect. In fact, we still laugh about how bad it was.

Eventually, however, the chunky fonts and poorly shaded buttons turned into a beautifully streamlined user interface. He didn't take any courses, didn't consult a professional, and didn't hire an assistant. He just worked on the platform for AnyMeal. And through that process, he got feedback from team members and users every day. It was his job to try, fail, and try again, and he wouldn't stop until he was proud of his work.

And that's the same experience that I had. Ben was not alone in struggling during the beginning of AnyMeal. I was actually even jealous of Ben's skillset coming in because compared to his (chunky fonts and all), my technical skills were not proving themselves. Practically everything I touched within the first few weeks of the startup failed, but I, like Ben, never gave up trying.

At first, AnyMeal was just a casual project I'd work on a couple hours a week. But quickly, as I began to take ownership of my own process and progress, I couldn't

get myself to stop refining my product and ideas. And in the process, the line between “fun” and “work” became so blurred I couldn’t tell the difference anymore. I found myself having video chats with the team at 4 a.m. and then calling them a few hours later on the bus to school.

After Ben started the app, we onboarded our first round of coders (also high school students², of course; we had to keep it on brand), headed by Daniel Chernenkov. Daniel took the reins in building the platform that uploaded all of the restaurant data to our app. Working with data labelers, we would scrape menus from the internet, make inferences on whether the dishes were friendly to various dietary restrictions, and then send our inferences to the restaurant managers to get final confirmation. Once we received the confirmation, it was time to upload all of our learned content onto the app.

I had first gotten in touch with Daniel through a mutual friend, Mickey Haslavsky. Mickey and I originally met through both being chosen for *Forbes Israel’s* “18 under 18.” I had been chosen to be on that year’s list of future change-makers because of the work I had done founding my school’s robotics team and for what I had already accomplished with AnyMeal, amongst other things. Mickey was chosen because at the ripe age of 15, he had created and sold some massive software. Needless to say, I was slightly intimidated by him, but flash forward a couple of months later, and I reached out to him for assistance.

Mickey agreed to become an advisor to our team, and he started mentoring me one on one on how to build out the company’s strategy. Because he had run a company

2 Thank you, Eytan Schulman, Alexa Rockwell, and the rest of the team!

before, Mickey was the perfect mentor. He was only a few years older than most of the team, but the advice and guidance he provided were invaluable. Mickey became my go-to person in everything I did (and to this day, he remains one of my closest friends and confidants).

In December 2013, after our platform was finally built, I flew to Palo Alto to spend three weeks with Drew. We made mind-blowing progress on our company (in part thanks to the Pop-Tart and microwaved-ramen-fueled all-nighters only 17-year-olds can keep up, not to mention the week when Drew slept only three hours over a 65-hour period). We traveled around Silicon Valley, meeting entrepreneurs and pitching to investors. We stayed up until sunrise talking about how to best sell AnyMeal to the next person we were meeting, based on our Wikipedia searches of their business background. We fielded countless business calls, and we passed out only when we were so physically tired we could not send one more outreach email. These were some of the best weeks of my life. We felt like we could do anything in the world. I had so much newfound confidence from onboarding people and expanding the company, and I constantly had to remind myself that this was only just the beginning—the world for me, a young entrepreneur, was my oyster.

One of the best things that came out of this whole season, however, was a newfound ability to manage and allocate my time. For starters, every morning I would take my daily standup meetings with Drew on the school bus. It was 7 a.m. my time, 9 p.m. Drew time, and 12 a.m. Ben time—the golden hour. So, every day I would run to the back of the bus to secure my isolated seat, and as kids started talking about prom and physics, I

would start debating unit economics with my co-founders. In European history class, I was often writing emails to advisors, lawyers, and everyone in between. In one of my less glamorous moments, I walked the fine line between work and school during our physical education class's mile run. I always hated the mile run, so I thought, "Why don't I use this time so I get something out of it?" So, while running, I conducted a business call with my co-founder. It was a crazy year.

Because each of us was so young, and we couldn't afford to make the startup the only thing in our lives we spent time on (as many founders do), we had to get crafty when it came to school. The important thing to realize, however, is that in budgeting our time so carefully, we didn't end up giving 50 percent here and 50 percent there—or dropping the ball on both pursuits just because we were doing them at the same time. The opposite actually turned out to be true. We ended up devoting ourselves 100 percent to both AnyMeal and school, precisely *because* we were doing them at the same time. There's a famous slogan in the Israeli startup world: *Innovation through necessity*. That is exactly what happened to us. We ended up creating productivity that didn't exist prior to the chaos because we all needed to be operating at new levels in order to stay successful.

I learned that to be a good entrepreneur, there is never the option to do something half-heartedly. When something needs to get done and it seems like there isn't enough time, resources, space, or funding, you simply have to find a way. Maybe it means sleeping a bit less (which I certainly learned how to do), or maybe it means taking phone calls while running. Whatever it is, if you

are passionate about your mission, you will find a way to best utilize the most valuable resource: time.

When I was working on AnyMeal, I found I no longer needed an hour and a half to study European history because operating at such a high level made me hyper-focused and sharp. I found I was able to learn material in only thirty minutes and free up the extra hour to work on my business strategy. As I switched back and forth among my multiple pursuits, I was revved up and locked in to each one. When I was writing an essay for school, that was the only thing in the world that mattered. I felt geared up to do it, but when I was giving a pitch 40 minutes later, AnyMeal was the only thing on my mind.

This all taught me the invaluable lesson that time is priceless. I learned that as entrepreneurs, inventors, and creators, we had to manage our time in order to squeeze every drop out of our day. As I learned to maximize my productivity, my favorite weeks quickly became my busiest ones. Of course, that never meant I was too busy for my relationships. I had a girlfriend at the time, and I was meeting with my friends for dinner at least twice a week. My co-founders and I found out that when we were doing what we loved and working at a fast pace, we managed to make time for everything that was important to us. This was such a surprise to us. I was happy, energized, and constantly motivated by the fact that between school and entrepreneurship, I was learning more than ever. The truth is that I was learning much more at AnyMeal than I ever learned in school. And beyond that, I hadn't let life get in the way of my passion.

Sure, I was what you would call a "good student." I liked classes, and I worked hard (and even graduated valedictorian). But something bothered me about

school—and it's the same thing that bugs a lot of other students. For so much of what I was studying in school, I couldn't figure out for the life of me how the hell I was going to use it later on!

Like most problems, it has a name. It's called *situated cognition*, the idea that you are taught something in a particular context, but you can't apply that learning to other scenarios. For example, studies about situated cognition show that divers who learned techniques on land couldn't remember them when in the water. Children who sold goods on the streets in Brazil were doing amazing basic arithmetic, yet they couldn't perform the same math in a classroom. Both situations were dealing with the same skills, but in different contexts.

So, it appears that when we're taught something, many times we can only apply it to the situation being taught. To understand concepts, some experiential connection is needed. Much to my surprise, I found out through actual work experience at AnyMeal that tools given to me at school were very helpful in building a startup.

So, as a high schooler, are you reading this thinking you don't have what it takes to build a startup? You probably do. Writing emails and proposals uses what you learn in English class. Doing market research puts research lessons from history class to the test. Collecting and analyzing data from users just means utilizing the skills you got from math and statistics lectures. These are just basic tools, and putting them to work toward achieving a concrete goal not only makes you better at them, but also makes them more meaningful. Often, the skills that matter most are learned by doing: We don't necessarily have them written out for us on a handout.

The skills I gained through AnyMeal, just by *doing*, were invaluable.

After about eight months of tireless work, we decided to end our work on Anymeal. While our mentors and prospect investors encouraged us to keep on working on it, they understood our decision. We were almost 18 by then and really had little choice. I was headed to the Israeli Defense Forces, where I would commit 100 percent of every day to working on cybersecurity-related projects in the Elite Technological Unit, and I was not allowed to continue working on a startup. My two co-founders were about to start college and, after being accepted to phenomenal institutions, had to commit their full time to their education. It was bittersweet. We may have had to bow out of significant startup potential, but we walked away with a wealth of new knowledge and new best friends.

Drew finished his undergraduate degree in MIT, attended both the Stanford School of Education and the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and became a Knight-Hennessy Scholar. He still remains one of my closest friends and holds my highest respect. It is one of my life goals to work with him again. Well, either with him or for him.

Ben studied finance at Carnegie Mellon University and went on to work for AIG and Tastytrade. He later launched Wingman Tracker, a software company for options trade tracking, which he runs until today. He also co-founded The TIE, a cryptocurrency data startup, which is also active and growing.

I ended up graduating with honors in the Israel Defense Forces cyber-security course, led teams in numerous technological developments, finished valedictorian

at the IDF Officers Academy, and received the 2019 Excellence Award of the IDF Elite Technological Unit.

Our experience at AnyMeal certainly gave us the tools to go on and do these things. But growing alongside Ben, Mickey, Daniel, and Drew was by far the greatest accomplishment that came out of AnyMeal. And through our passion, we were able to impact the communities around us. Because it was fairly out of the ordinary to run a startup at 17, I became something of a mentor for other young teenagers in Israel hoping to get started in entrepreneurship. Quickly, the five of us became go-to people for kids to chat with at hackathons or people to email if young entrepreneurs wanted advice.

At the time, however, I didn't think much of what we had done, other than I knew I had gotten a taste of startup culture and I wanted more. To us, it was all a great adventure trying to come up with a product that could help many. Maybe we will be able to pick it up again in the future. I know I'd like to. For now, I just hope we can share a bit of what we learned with other high schoolers to inspire them to found their own startups.

I'm not saying having a startup guarantees you're going to be the next Mark Zuckerberg or create the next Google. No way. I don't have to tell anyone reading this book about the low success rate of startups, and I probably don't have to tell anyone reading about the value of a good education. Also, remember that Larry Page and Sergey Brin went to Stanford Graduate School, and Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg went to Harvard for two years each before they dropped out. Their success took plenty of education.

And I'm not saying that school is somehow less meaningful than startup experience. It's not. I've had

incredible teachers, and school was challenging and rewarding in its own way. All I'm saying is that school doesn't have to *stop you* from doing something else, too.

Even if you're only 14 years old, living in a small, remote town, you can tap into the superpowers that every entrepreneur has: imagination, energy, and a refusal to give up.

Maybe you have a startup idea, but you're thinking to yourself, "It's way too complicated. What do I know?" Well, you probably know much more than you think. And if you don't have a startup idea, just think about some problems that concern you and how to address them.

Then, when push comes to shove, how do you start a startup? Get a few friends together, kick around some ideas, pick the best one, and then start putting it on paper. Look around you, search for examples of startups that speak to you, scour the internet, ask your teachers for advice, and roll from there. Don't forget the most powerful tool: experimentation. Trying and failing is fun. It shows that you're actually learning.

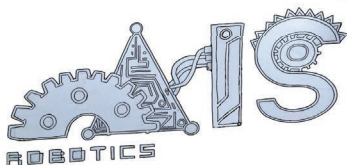
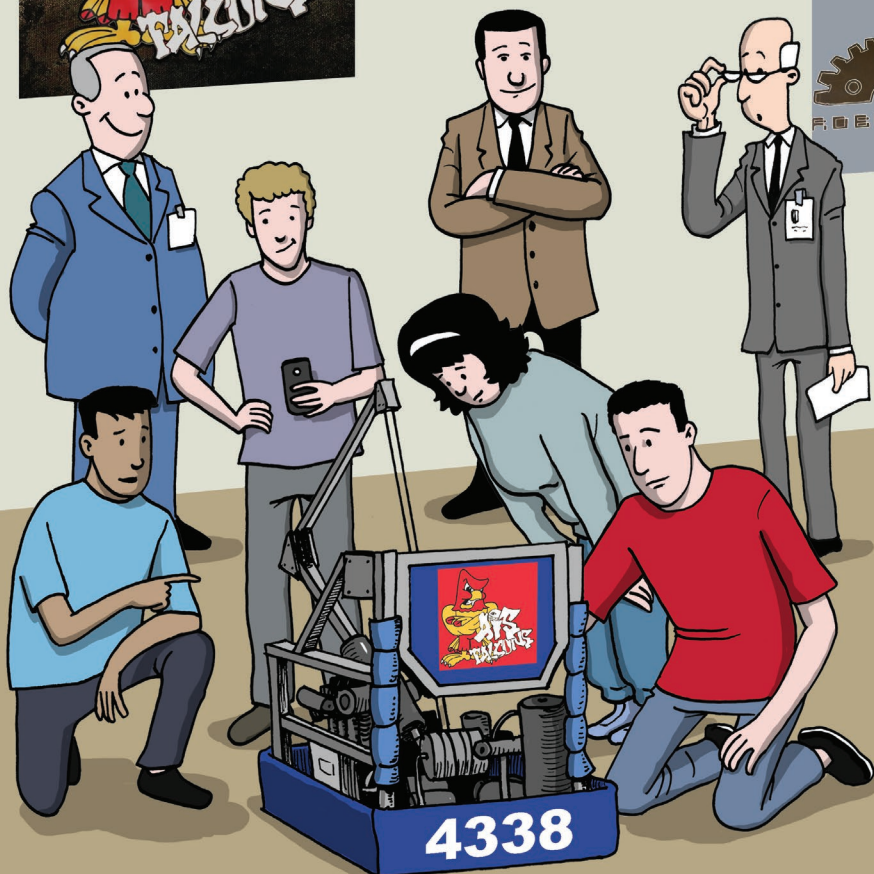
Most of all, don't be afraid or discouraged by those who might tell you not to bother. If you are really passionate about something, try, try, and try again. And even if your first startup does not become Google, there is no failure in that. The experience itself is already the success and a stepping-stone to your next venture. The famous inventor Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed, I just found 10,000 ways that don't work."

During the year I spent on AnyMeal, I hardly slept, and I was working as if I were five people. But looking back, it was the most exhilarating year of my life. I learned how to design a product, write a business plan,

talk with investors, work with lawyers and bankers, code programs, market to thousands of people, and manage employees. And who gets to do this when they're only 17? In today's world, any passionate teen can.



HIGH SCHOOL ROBOTICS



“In the venture world it doesn’t pay to be ‘pragmatic’ and ‘practical.’ This is because the practical side will push you to accept too many compromises, and you will end up with a product that nobody wants. Rather, build your crazy dream into reality, and have no fear. This is the only kind of venture that will spell success, and there is no other way.”

Irina Meyer, *Managing Partner, Sils Capital*

“It used to be that decisions went up, they were made at the top, and then those orders came down. But that’s almost reversed. Decisions are being made in teams, and it’s important for executives to understand all the decisions being made so they can better align and guide the team.”

Ilan Frank, *Vice President, Slack*

“Entrepreneurship is a huge life choice that is highly demanding and will consume most of you. Be prepared.”

Gil Frosting, *Previous Vice President Intel and Qualcomm; Strategic Investor*

“Don’t let ‘perfect’ be the enemy of ‘good.’ Experiment, try something new, and begin the process of actually running a business, even before you feel like you are ready. This will likely feel hard because many schools teach us that perfect is better than good! Making that mental switch will accelerate your chances of succeeding.”

Mary Winn Miller, *Co-Founder, Endevvr*

“Persevere. You can only win the game if you are in the game. You can’t win the game sitting outside. So figure out a way to keep going at it and keep yourself in the game no matter what.”

Nilesh Trivedy, *Principal, J-Ventures*

In ninth grade, I was invited to participate in a leadership conference in Abu Dhabi. This was a great personal honor and also very out of the ordinary, as Israelis were typically barred from traveling to Abu Dhabi. Because I was also a U.S. citizen, I was able to attend.

The leadership conference brought together high school students from around the world. There, I heard pioneers from many fields talk about how we can harness the power of social entrepreneurship to change the world. We discussed local and global challenges, thinking together about how each one of us could take a role in addressing them. I met countless kids from every corner of the globe, each with that same entrepreneurial spirit. Everyone there wanted to change the world.

Upon my return home, I felt the burning desire to create something. I felt hungry to help, to address, to lead. I was ready to pour myself into a project—I just didn't know how to start.

Having since had the opportunity to meet and work with many young entrepreneurs, I believe this is often a common theme: There is the indescribable pull to do something, but it can sometimes be difficult to find out exactly what that *something* should be. I believe that the best projects come directly out of an attempt to solve a problem, rather than speculation of what a consumer may or may not need. That's why, at that age, I looked for problem-solving inspiration in my immediate community. I formed an initiative called Inspired. The goal of this club was to find creative ways to use the high school

world around us to effect social change domestically and abroad. When I first launched the program, about a dozen people joined from my school of 200 students. I had about five percent of the student body on my team (not too shabby for my first go at it, if you ask me!).

We started meeting weekly to brainstorm how we could make a difference. One of the first projects we settled on was a fundraiser for an orphanage in Nepal. The man who ran the orphanage had spoken at the conference I attended and truly moved me with the work he was doing. Knowing that the targets of our fundraiser would be teenagers, we had to get creative with what “product” to sell. After examining both the environment we were in (our school) and the intended audience (fellow students), we decided to host a teacher talent show. Students at my high school adored their teachers, so we were sure it would be a success.

The teachers all pitched in their talents. It was an evening of laughter and commitment. In the end, we raised \$3,000 for the Nepalese orphanage. What had started as a small seed inside me to do good had grown into something that was now assisting children in need. I was excited about the work we were doing, as well as having my first real opportunity to lead a team. While in retrospect \$3,000 is a relatively modest amount of money, for me as a high schooler, it was a lot. And while the money was hopefully helpful to the orphanage, the emotional impact on me and those driving Inspired was undoubtedly greater.

Through Inspired, I got my first real taste of the joys and challenges that come with the responsibility of being a project leader. I worked hard to bring my school community together, thought up creative ways to keep

weekly meetings productive and engaging, and evaluated the specifics of our environment to make our plan the most successful it could be.

At the time, I was mostly just excited about doing good in the world, but moments like this in my life are why I always encourage teenagers who want to make a change to simply *get started*. If you have that fire inside of you, like I did, grab a group of people, start bouncing ideas around, and become inspired by how you can mobilize the community around you to do good. I promise you'll become a better leader, and you'll likely learn a thing or two about entrepreneurship along the way.

This is perhaps best demonstrated by another project I started in high school. As a sophomore, now more comfortable in taking on the challenges of leading, I was ecstatic when my two friends, Elhanan and Gershon, came to me with an idea to create our school's first robotics team. Our goal was to create a team strong enough to compete—and do well—in the national and international robotics competitions. We calculated our expenses and found that to afford the state-of-the-art machinery needed to build competitive robots, we were going to need \$25,000 in funding from our school—not to mention the lab space we'd need to build and store our robots, as well as the time, parental support, and mentorship we'd need to get started. *Yikes*.

So, one lunch break in between AP calculus and AP physics, the three rookie engineers knocked on the door of our school's administration office. We tried to sell the faculty on our dream. We explained not only that this would be an incredible opportunity for any students interested in STEM, but also that (knowing how to read a room and knowing that the school administration

was interested also in building our school's reputation) this project would place our school on the map as a top engineering high school in Israel. We told them about FIRST, an amazing organization encouraging girls and boys from all over the world to work on robots, fostering an incredible, supportive, and cooperative environment. They rejected us. A rational decision, frankly, considering the immense amount of funding we were requesting for a club with very little demonstrated interest from the student body.

We weren't ready to give up, however, so we went back in for an appeal a couple of days later. "Reconsider!" we said. They rejected us again. Looking back, I can understand where the school was coming from: We were a small institution with relatively tight constraints on what we could do financially. Plus, as I mentioned, the administration probably doubted we could find enough people to create a sizable team. But I didn't consider these things then. I only thought about how great it would be to spend my days building and competing with robots.

Elhanan, Gershon, and I knew we couldn't stop there. We might have been rookies, sure, but we were prepared to do whatever it took to create our team. After all, we were not asking for a lavish field trip or a week off from school. We were asking for an environment to build and create (which just *happened* to cost \$25,000).

We decided to bring our idea instead to the school's Board of Directors. When the time came, we put on our best shirts, wrote up our talking points and arguments, and gave our pitch. Essentially, we were explaining to the board why they should invest in us.

While remaining respectful of the administration's initial ruling (and not just because they were also in the

conference room), we encouraged the board to look at the long-term benefits of sponsoring our club. We explained that because the board was a group of high-level decision-makers, they should support a project that would positively impact the reputation of the school for years to come, even if it would cost the institution some money in the short term.

Reflecting on this moment, I can see this pitch was yet another opportunity that uncannily mirrored situations an entrepreneur may have to encounter. But, of course, I didn't know that at the time. All the three of us cared about was the board voting in our favor. To our great surprise, they did!

Now that the board supported our mission, the administration joined in their support, and we were given the go-ahead to form our robotics team: 4338 Falcons. After speaking with many teachers and students, we found seven students who were a good fit to join. Elhanan, who was senior to us, served as our captain; Gershon was our programmer, and I took charge of mechanics. The way the robotics season was structured, we had six weeks to develop and build our robot for competition based on specs provided by the competition organizers. Since we were rookies, we weren't quite sure how to prepare. We felt like three dogs who had been promised a steak if only we could figure out how to walk on two legs. To build a strong and competitive robot was the only thing in the world we wanted, but we were going to stumble quite a bit before we got there. Nevertheless, we committed ourselves to a life of 3 a.m. Pop-Tarts and hours of standing by in bewilderment as our robot drove itself repeatedly into a wall. With us, through this all, was Uri

Cohen, who came to mentor us with great enthusiasm and personal care.

Somewhere in between the all-nighters and the short naps we stole on the floor of our garage workshop, we found we were just as enthusiastic to fail as we were to succeed. When something malfunctioned, or when one of us spontaneously fell asleep on top of our pizza because we had been awake for three days straight, we weren't frustrated: We were getting closer to our dream. My 16th birthday was celebrated at 11 p.m. with the small team singing "Happy Birthday" and my parents bringing over a cake to fuel our next, much-needed sugar rush. It was grueling and fantastic, and we had never been so exhausted in our young lives, but we wouldn't have had it any other way. Our robot, which was destined to play basketball and balance on narrow bridges, was taking shape.

One of the highlights of this experience was the last night we spent building before shipping our robot off to the competition. After working all day and night, we finally had a robot that could grab a ball and shoot it into the hoop. We spent the early hours of the morning calibrating it so that it could shoot with greater accuracy. By the time we finished, it was already 8 a.m. and the school day had started. The principal brought in a class of first graders to watch us drive our robot and put on the finishing touches. The whole first grade class held their breath as the robot grabbed a basketball from the floor and moved it into position. When the robot sank it into the hoop, the room erupted in cheering. Our robot scored!

Finally, after six weeks of hard work, and with more determination than we knew we had, we even made it

to the semifinals of the national competition. Along the way we knew that we were a part of something meaningful, but nothing can describe the feeling of being at nationals. As the head of mechanics, I was the driver of the robot, so I had the honor of kneeling on the field in front of the whole Israeli robotics scene, thousands of spectators, and controlling our 125-pound metal creation. It didn't matter that we didn't know exactly what we were doing. We were three teenagers who had poured every fiber of our being into getting this robot to work. And it did.

We received congratulations from our math and physics teachers, whose classes we missed because we were working 24/7. While missing out on the formal curriculum of mathematics and physics required us to catch up on our own, we were learning math, physics, and engineering hands on in the garage. What better classroom can there be than the one you build yourself?

Our school quickly forgot that just a few weeks prior it had turned down our request to found the team. We were blasted all over our school's social media, newsletters, and websites. It was great to see how things had turned around. We were proud of our school. Not every bureaucracy can find it within itself to change.

Finally, with the entire school's blessing, our robotics team had what it needed to fight harder than ever. The following year, I became the team captain, and the year after that, I handed leadership off to another team member. Then, just one year ago, when our robotics team won the Israeli national championship, I had the privilege of joining the team at both the Israeli finals and, months later, at the world championships in Detroit.

I showed up to the Israeli competition dressed as our school's mascot, a falcon, as if it hadn't been five years since I'd graduated high school. When my school's team won, they called the "mascot" into the arena to take pictures with them. When I removed my mask, after a moment of surprise, the two team mentors placed a medal around my neck. At first I protested, saying this medal was not mine to wear, but the teachers said I was the father of this program, and without me, so many students would not have been exposed to the world of robotic engineering. I teared up. What an honor.

The students we ended up inspiring were not just at my high school. We used the video footage from our first competition as a motivational tool to pitch to both our own school and others around the country why engineering education is important. The year after I headed the robotics team, I was invited to a conference held at Tel Aviv University to give a talk about building a robot in six weeks. I learned from others that the quick success our team had in just our first two years of work encouraged other teams in Israel that they did not need a robotic legacy at their school to be competitive. Over the years, we invited teams to our robotics lab and shared our know-how and experience with them. We were paying it forward. When we were just starting out, teams like 2630 Thunderbolts from Emek Hefer and 1577 Steampunk from Raanana helped us get on our feet, offering their advice and walking us through the intricacies of building a robot (despite the fact they knew they would be competing against us). They were incredible, as were our mentors Eli Barak and Uri Cohen. It was our turn to share our know-how with other teams and

help them get into the game. The rookies had proven themselves.

So, what does this all boil down to? I learned more about dedication and teamwork than I ever knew was possible. As I've said, the three of us on the original robotics team slept very little. But the determination that we shared brought us together for an experience I will never forget. To be a young entrepreneur, a young builder, a young team member, and a young *leader* is the greatest thing in the world. You learn every life skill imaginable firsthand. Of course, I would grow up to cultivate these skills more formally, but the foundation was undoubtedly built on what the team accomplished in that garage. And why?

For one, the robotics team fostered within me a deep sense of creativity and confidence. It gave me the space to take what I was learning in school and put it into practice. As a result, I cared about my schoolwork more deeply. Second, it opened up doors that wouldn't have been available to me if I hadn't had the hands-on experience building complex robots.

Let me give you an example. Fast forward five years, and I'm invited to attend Mahanet, an annual "unconference" put on by the security unit of the Israeli military. The premise is the following: Outside the scope of your regular tasks, you work for a couple of months (in your spare time) as a team on a software or engineering project and then present it to members of the unit in one big, celebrative outing. The catch? The creations have to be absurd, but, of course, totally cool. We geeks love that sort of stuff.

I met with my team for the first time during our lunch break, and, given how hungry we were, it didn't take

long for us to start talking about food. We were inspired by a team from a previous year, a group of officers who cooked 500kg of fish on a stove built entirely of magnets. But we weren't all as passionate about seafood as we were about pancakes. And as we all had experience with robotics, a pancake-making robot sounded like a dream to us. Every weekend for a few months, we would all meet up at my former high school's robotics lab, the same garage I had toiled away in years before. Eventually, we ended up with the most useless, yet most lovable, showcase of what engineering can do.

Our pancake-making robot was small enough to fit on a desk but robust enough to make endless pancakes (one every 30 seconds to be precise), handling everything from mixing the batter to serving the fluffy perfection on a plate. When the time came, we took it to Mahanet, where, before the mayor of Tel Aviv and the Israeli security members, it successfully cooked and served perfect pancakes. While the robot might have looked ridiculous to watch, it was an indescribable feeling to know that my team could think up anything—and I mean anything—and that we had the tools to build it together. This kind of confidence and creativity came directly from the robotics team in high school.

The other lesson the robotics team experience taught me was that you should never stop doing what you love just because someone tells you to. If something or someone is keeping you from achieving your dreams, whether it's your school administration or another authority figure, don't despair. A roadblock doesn't mean there isn't a way forward. You might have to be creative to find it, but in a way, that's just another win.

I also learned that bureaucracies can be made to change. It is not always possible, but my former high school was eventually able to rise above its strict rules, examine its budget, and fully support us. This isn't something to be taken lightly, and it's something I constantly have to remind myself of. Between my hackathons, the military, and my startups, there were always obstacles, bureaucratic red tape, and a million "no"s. While a positive end result is never guaranteed, there are times one should be brave enough not to take that initial "no" for an answer. You will often encounter resistance if you want to challenge norms and change how things are done. But, if you can change how an organization or group does things, you can carve out a path that others will use for years—or decades—to come.

STEP BY STEP



“Choose a subject. Dive deep into it. Strive to be the best at that subject even if it takes years. It could be an area of chemistry, machine learning for specific usages, computational biology, or quantum computers. The world of the future will require more scientific entrepreneurship—they will be the drivers for you to make this world a bit better.”

Dov Moran, *Managing Partner, Grove Ventures*

“When I look back on my life, I understand that only if I love something very much can I give my best and do my best.”

Neta Rivkin, *3X Olympic Athlete; World Championship Medal*

“Always say yes. Whether it’s a chance to meet someone, an opportunity to join a project, or anything else, make sure to always say yes, regardless of how busy you might be. You never know how one thing might lead to another.”

Max August, *Investment Professional on the Technology Team, General Atlantic*

“If you try to achieve something, do what needs to be done as many times as needed. Don’t give up on the first, second, or even on the tenth time.”

Tomer Cohen, *Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, Tech2Peace*

“It’s not about the goal, it’s about the journey. It’s like running a marathon: You suffer all the way, and when you reach the goal, you think: “I have enjoyed it so much! When is the next race?”

Sergio Fogel, *Co-Founder, dLocal*

First, it starts in my head. My brain jolts forward like I've just slammed the brakes of my car. It's involuntary, as if I've been catapulted into new space. I get this feeling whenever I set a new personal goal for myself. It feels as if my subconscious has been thinking up a new adventure, and the second it lets my conscious mind in on it, I jolt forward into action. I have to go finish what my mind started.

What would it be like if I learned how to scuba dive in a week? Ran a mile every day for a year? Performed a random act of kindness every morning for five months? I have always found that when I set my own goals, create my own agenda, and lay out a plan designed only for myself, my success is greatest. Working for the betterment of yourself because you want to, not because your coach is making you run or your parents are making you study, shifts you into a growth mindset where, suddenly, anything feels possible. I call this the mentality of being a serial goal-setter.

Not Taking 'No' for an Answer

My goal-setting mindset started in high school. I absolutely loved math, but I felt the curriculum moved too slowly for the pace at which I wanted to learn. So, when I was approaching the summer after ninth grade, I thought up a plan. What if, instead of taking Algebra II the following year, I mastered the material on my own that summer and went directly into precalculus in the fall?

Having thought up the idea, I immediately felt the blood rush to my head. I jolted forward: I wanted to get started. I ran home from school and told my parents my plan.

“OK, Michael,” my mother said, “that sounds like a cool idea, but don’t kill yourself over it.”

They knew how I could be: Once I dedicated myself to something, I was in it 100 percent. As concerned parents, they didn’t want me overworked during my summer vacation. I promised them I would stop if it became too much (even though I had no intentions of keeping that promise). Running back to school the next day, I went straight to the administration’s office.

After I started explaining my idea, one of the administrators held up her hand.

“No.”

She told me it was out of the question and simply not something the school could permit. Never shying away from a challenge, I went back the next day.

“We’re a school that fosters curiosity,” I began. “I, as a passionate math student, want to take advantage of this summer vacation to further my curiosity for learning.”

Some teachers started to roll their eyes.

“I’ll pass an exam at the end of the summer that proves I know the material, and then I’ll enroll in the more advanced class.”

There was a pause. Then: “No, you won’t.” They didn’t believe I would do it. And they thought that even if I did, there might still be a significant gap between what I studied over the summer and what the other kids studied for a full year.

That only made me even more determined. I went to the Algebra II teacher and asked if she could point me

in the right direction to begin my studies that summer. She referred me to a textbook and some online courses where I could watch videos that covered the content.

That summer, I spent four hours a day—at my desk, on the plane and hotel rooms when traveling on vacation, on the floor of my grandparents' living room, wherever I was—gradually making my way through the Algebra II curriculum. If my teachers didn't think I'd learn the material, that only motivated me more. Whenever someone doubts my abilities, it always fuels my desire to show what I'm capable of. So, page by page, I progressed through the textbook. As I approached the end of the summer vacation, I sent an email to the administration making my case:

I know you were against this idea at the end of the term, but I had extra time on my hands and wanted to learn the material regardless. I think I should be tested on it, and, if I succeed, I should be allowed to start precalculus.

Through accomplishing my goal with hard work and dedication, I had placed the administration in a dilemma: On the one hand, they had rejected my proposition initially, but on the other hand, it wasn't a great use of their math class to give a seat to a kid who already knew the material. Once I had actually completed learning the material, they were open to me joining the class above. So, they agreed to my proposal the next time around, and we decided that if I was able to pass last year's final exam with a good grade, I could advance to precalculus.

As I walked into school on the day of my exam, my heart was racing. It was as if I had been training to run a marathon for a year, and suddenly I was at the starting line. I wanted to prove to myself that my hard work had paid off, but also that I was capable of teaching myself.

With eight pencils (in case seven spontaneously broke; I was that kind of student), I sat down to take the test.

When I opened the exam, my heart dropped. There were questions about topics I had never seen before. I quickly realized that even though the teacher had given me one textbook, the exam pulled from all of the materials the teacher had used in the class. Nevertheless, I had trained hard for this, and if I was going to end up defeated, I would be defeated squarely. I answered each question as best I could, and, at the sound of the bell, I handed my exam to the teacher.

A couple days later, I received a message from the administration:

Michael, congratulations! You missed the target grade by a few points, but we decided to allow you to jump the class anyway. Best of luck.

I was ecstatic. All I could think of was how proud I was of myself for not giving up (and how vindicating it was to have “shown” the administration). I had trusted my gut that even a 14-year-old should be allowed to follow his creativity and teach himself something, and in the end, it all paid off. Later in high school, when the administration would tell me and my friends that we could not start a robotics team, I would think back to this moment. This is how I set out to accomplish each of my goals: If I set my mind to something, I was getting it done—no matter who said no or how difficult and painful it was. Of course, moving up in math wasn’t necessarily painful. Let’s talk about a goal that was.

The 100 Day Transformation

During my time in the Israel Defense Forces, I was living in Ramat Hasharon, one of the more popular cities for young people in Israel. I had a room in a shared bachelors' apartment above a string of fast-food restaurants, and I absolutely loved the lifestyle: coming home from long days at the base, meeting up with my friends, grabbing burgers and beer at the restaurants downstairs. The only problem? I had begun to love the lifestyle a bit too much, or rather, I had begun to love the burgers and beer a bit too much. The pounds packed on.

As a typically energetic, fit person, I hated feeling sluggish and weighed down. I figured I could gradually get myself on a diet and start working slowly toward my fitness goals, but I rejected that idea as quickly as I came up with it; it felt way too dull. So, I decided I wanted to do an experiment: How much could I transform my body in 100 days?

As with all of my goals, as soon as I thought of it, I knew I was going to see it to completion. Immediately, I called three people: The first was Tomer Raviv, a personal trainer; the second was Nir Schneider, a nutritionist; and the third was a doctor from the Israel Defense Forces. I proclaimed my goal and asked them if they would like to help me and be a part of the journey. To my great excitement, they all said yes. So, we got going.

The first day of my training session, I showed up exhausted and late—so, that was less than ideal, but at least I was starting! I met a disappointed Tomer at a local park, and under overcast skies, we hit the ground running (well, actually, not running: Jumping jacks, jump rope, and push-ups were my punishment for showing up

late the first day). After what seemed like hours, with my bright blue Nike shirt navy with sweat, my first session was done. Sure, I almost threw up on my way home, but I was excited to have finally started. Only 99 days left!

I went to the supermarket the next morning and picked up all my fuel for the next week or so. For the next 100 days, all I would be eating would be protein and vegetables.

By day 15, the workouts weren't wearing me out so much, but my desire to keep doing them started to fade. It was getting a bit harder for me to wake up early every morning before reporting to the military base with full motivation to go work out. The most challenging part was tempering my expectations for results and fitness with patience. After killing myself in the gym, I wanted to leave and see a six-pack—but I had to tell myself this was going to take time.

That night (I had moved up to working out twice a day, once before work, once after), I didn't straighten my arms enough during an exercise, so my trainer had me do 1,500 jump rope jumps as punishment. I must admit, though brutal, I was starting to love the accountability and grit required to get me through training. Punishment was just what I needed to go to bed excited for day 16.

Unfortunately, I wasn't excited enough: I overslept and came nine minutes late to my session. So, nine minutes meant 9,999 jumps (which my trainer, thankfully, told me was a joke, and I ended up doing about 2,000).

I began including my friends and family in the journey. I would cook healthy meals for my parents every Wednesday, and for certain workouts, my friends would join me on the beach. I realized this wasn't just

my challenge: I was helping those around me make positive changes and push themselves as well. I started seeing progress in both my body and mind: The fat was coming off, my abs were forming, and I was waking up in the morning with a clearer, quicker mind. On day 31, I wrote a message from my future self, imagining that I was so successful at losing weight that my army pants were starting to fall off at work. *Nice job, Michael.*

Day 32, I was late again. My trainer yelled at me: “You’re not late to work, are you? Are you late to your family? To your girlfriend? So, why are you late to my workouts?”

“Big mistake,” I replied.

He had me lunge up a massive hill while he followed me, yelling:

“Are you late to family dinners? Are you late to the army?”

“No, I’m not late to the army.” Lunge. “No.” Lunge. “No.” Lunge. “No.” Lunge.

The challenge began feeling impossibly long, and the end felt miles away. I had to constantly keep reminding myself: One day at a time.

One of the most difficult parts was managing dinners and holidays with family. My family and I spent Passover vacation in Greece, and each night I would sit at the table with my pre-packaged oatmeal and protein shake while they ate delicious Mediterranean food.

But it was all worth it. On day 71, I could start to see my abs when I looked in the mirror, and that tasted better than any gourmet meal. I also learned how to meet my goals, no matter what conflicts came in the way. Even when I was away from my trainer and could not follow my typical workout routine, I found a way to

make it work. At the military base, I would carry a mat on my back and work out in between meetings. I turned my commander's office into a squat rack by doing lunges and deadlifts while carrying the logistical rulebooks of the IDF. Whether it was cardio on the street, abs in my bedroom, or leg lifts in the shower, I must have trained in about 40 different makeshift venues by the end of the challenge.

The experience also pushed me to learn so much more about nutrition and body composition. I took online nutrition classes so I could accurately debate with my nutritionist about my calorie deficit down to the last calorie. I measured every last ounce of each bite I took—not because I couldn't control my passion for upholding the diet restrictions, but because I treated the challenge like acing a test. I wanted to make every day count as much as possible. I knew I would never do this again, so it was now or never.

By the end of the experience, I felt like a new person (and a lighter one, at 8% less body fat!). Not only had I established healthy patterns for myself that—even if I planned on loosening up a bit—I would carry with me for life, but I had completed something I set out to do entirely for myself. Maybe it's all the endorphins from working out, but I'm never as happy as I am when I take on a physical goal with my own two hands.

The Desert Marathon

I had a similar experience a couple of years later. As we all know, the ads that pop up on our computer screens are highly personalized (which, unpopular opinion alert, I actually think is incredibly cool). Well, a couple

of years after the 100-day fitness challenge, I received an ad for the Eilat Desert Marathon. Now, I had never run a marathon before. I did a half marathon in high school, which nearly killed me, and while I loved running, I hadn't done much running since. For some reason, though, as soon as I saw that ad, I felt something in me jolt forward. I knew I had to run it.

There were only two problems. One, I wasn't nearly fit enough and had no clue how to start training. Two, the race was only a month away. Having read this far, however, you can probably guess what I did. I opened my laptop and logged on to Facebook. My fingers typing before I could even think, I posted: *Running a marathon in a month! Stay tuned for the journey!*

I have always been this way: As soon as I have an idea I want to see to fruition, I tell someone (or the world) about it right away. That way, I have social accountability for my goals. Well, with the Facebook post out in the world and no time to lose, I called up some runner friends and trainers to get tips. Then, I immediately took to the streets.

Flash forward to the end of the month, and I'm not sure I was even thinking about being a serial goal-setter anymore. I had chafed thighs, bleeding feet, and all I wanted was for the day of the race to finally come. When it finally did, I traveled to Eilat, bringing my family and friends. I asked my dad and Dan, one of my best friends, to wait at the 32-kilometer mark and finish with me.

The marathon started at about 5 a.m. to try and beat the scorching Eilat heat. As I was running, I had musical theater soundtracks blasting. I would change the show depending on my mood ("Defying Gravity" from

Wicked for when I felt weighed down, and “Helpless” from *Hamilton* for when I felt, well, helpless).

Every second was painful, and my entire body hurt throughout the whole marathon. As with every journey, the end goal seemed unreachable. Reaching the next meter, however, seemed doable. So, that’s how I kept going: inch by inch, one foot in front of the other. Eventually, the centimeters turned to kilometers and the goal was realized.

When I made it to the finish line, I cranked up “Who I’d Be” from *Shrek* (how I finish every great challenge) and sobbed my way across the final meter.

There is an iconic family photo of my dad crossing the finish line with me: Him with his glowing skin and eager smile, me with a grimace and (not pictured) bloody toes. No one looking at the photo would know my dad had only run the last ten kilometers: He just looks like a dad, 30 years older than his son, effortlessly outperforming him. He used to compete nationally in track and jumping in his youth, so he probably would have finished the entire marathon that effortlessly anyway.

Having run for four hours and 40 minutes of non-stop, agonizing pain, I pretty much crawled to the hotel room to take a bath. Every part of my body felt broken. My hips felt like they slipped from their sockets and my ankles swelled up like water balloons. Exhaustion doesn’t begin to cover it: My body was taking revenge. When I got in the bath, I tried to imagine I was weightless. The warm water was soothing for a bit, but of course, there came a time when I had to get out. The only problem: I couldn’t.

The pain coursing through my body was so intense that I could not physically move. I called out for help, and two friends had to lift me out of the bath. It became

obvious that I had done some serious damage, particularly to my knee. My body simply hadn't been trained to take so much exertion in one day.

I had to go through physical therapy for quite some time, and though it was weeks before I could walk without a limp, I gained a new appreciation for my body. Not being able to run while I was rehabilitating was frustrating, and I learned an important lesson. While these goals I set out for myself might feel amazing, they also need to be performed with caution. It's not worth diving into something, or letting your body take the jolt, if you're going to end up hurting yourself. I relearned what personal accountability means to me, especially when I'm not reporting to another person. Moving forward, I would try and heed the benevolent angel on my shoulder a bit more, making peace with the fact that it might not be possible to do everything with 110 percent effort 100 percent of the time.

8 Days to the Kilimanjaro Summit

The last goal I'll mention might have been the most physically trying, and it certainly felt the most difficult. This was my quest to summit Mount Kilimanjaro. Unlike my other two goals, I actually did this one alongside my brother, Or, and my father, which, despite my independent streak, only made the experience that much more meaningful.

Our journey started when we landed in Ethiopia. We collected our eight bags (one of which was ripped open—only slightly disconcerting), and headed off to Tanzania, where we would begin our climb. As we drove in the van through Tanzania, I gazed out the window of the car

with an excitement impossible to describe. Looking at the vast expanses of flatland that stretched around me, it seemed impossible to imagine that Kilimanjaro—the highest point in Africa—could be anywhere nearby. Finally, our driver pulled into a clearing and pointed: “There.”

The massive mountain seemed worlds away, the peak so high you could not see it because it was covered in clouds. I almost choked. We were really climbing that?! It seemed impossible, but I was ready to try. After a quick snack of sugarcane, we arrived at Londorossi Gate, the entrance to Kilimanjaro National Park.

We started the climb giddy and cracking jokes, even if after two minutes we already started feeling tired. The path we followed barely looked like a trail, just a strip of dirt lined with sticks—all that separated us from thick jungle bush. Not to mention that these sticks would disappear after a couple kilometers. For seven hours, we climbed until we made it to the first camp: MTI Mkubwa, 2,650 meters above sea level, with endless views of the impossibly green savannah.

Our guides constantly checked on us for signs of altitude sickness—headache, nausea, vomiting—though luckily all of us were still doing fine.

Blasting my musical theater tunes (on day two it was primarily *Wicked* and *If/Then*), we hiked on.

“Pole pole!” our guides would yell, which means “slowly” or “take it easy” in Swahili. Step by step.

At one point during the climb, our guide stopped to point out the peak we were attempting to summit: It still seemed unfathomably far away, even if we were approaching it step by step.

The view to the side of the ridge we were walking along was mesmerizing. Beneath us, we spotted small wonders: creeks and creatures, rocks and bush, and around us lay what seemed to be the entire world. Vast hills spread out before us, steam rolling off their backs and mingling with the clouds above, which seemed to spill out forever. Finally, after another eight-hour climb, we reached Shira Camp, at 3,610 meters above sea level.

After a dinner of chicken and potato wedges, we headed to sleep. On the morning of day three, my body didn't know what hit it. My feet were so numb they felt more like an idea, dissociated from my body. But that was a problem for another day because we still had ten kilometers to hike.

On this day, the scenery shifted as we headed higher and higher in altitude: The greens and blues turned to ash and rock. We were surrounded by expanses of fire-ball lily plants and stony volcanic earth. It was on that day when we started to hike in the truest sense: There was no more path, only the wisdom of our guide, who told us which rocks were least unstable for us to climb on. We crawled and pulled our way up and over stone formations, reaching Barranco many hours later.

The next morning I woke up comforted by the reminder that day four was only going to be six kilometers—and also refreshed because the cold started to settle in as we entered high altitude.

The day's hike was (relatively) short but much more difficult because of the intensity of the altitude. We were definitely feeling it by the end, heaving and trying not to misstep—and fall off the edge of the mountain. The height was no joke. We could see the guides watching over us, a bit concerned.

Finally, it was time to attempt the summit, the hardest part of the whole trip. The body is already exhausted from the seven days of climbing, and breathing gets considerably harder in thin air. Because we started the final hike in the middle of the night so we could summit by sunrise, my brother and I tried to take a final nap. Unfortunately, neither of us could fall asleep. The wind was rattling our tent, and we were absolutely freezing. Both of us hysterically laughing, and at a breaking point of insanity, we proclaimed this was the worst day of our lives.

Finally, at 11:45 p.m., we set out.

“LET’S GO,” I shouted to the wind.

Our guides told us this was one of the hardest days of the year to summit, and that the temperature, negative 25 degrees Celsius, was about the coldest it ever got on the mountain. We had seven hours of climbing ahead of us in the pitch dark. I felt the wind whipping my face (it genuinely felt like a leather whip across my eyes and nose), and my whole body burned all of its energy generating enough heat to keep my blood from freezing in my veins. Before we began the hike, we were asked to make a crucial decision: to hike with poles or not. Most people choose not to because if you keep your hands out of your pockets (even with two or three gloves on), your hands turn to ice. I, on the other hand, was still recovering from my marathon-induced knee journey, and so I decided to use my poles.

Big mistake. After about eight minutes, I could not feel my fingers, let alone move them. I put my poles back in my bag and shoved my hands in my pockets. They never warmed up, but having the added protection of the pockets prevented them from getting any colder.

These last seven hours were by far the most difficult of the journey. The cold was biting, like an ice cube in salt. It was like dunking in an ice bath—and then being held in the bath for seven hours. The wind hits you. It burns.

“ONE TEAM, ONE DREAM, POLE POLE,” our guide called out into the darkness. I was in too much pain to laugh. I spent every minute of the hike thinking I was going to quit. Every step, I felt only disbelief that I was taking another. I kept telling myself, “Just don’t quit now—you can quit in five minutes, if you want; just don’t quit now.”

Every five minutes, I made myself hold out five more. Pole pole.

There was also the incessant doubt: Why are we doing this? Why endure this pain? None of us spoke about it, but we all knew we were thinking about quitting. Yet the second that idea was spoken into the air—the second my father, being a responsible parent, asked us if we were sure about summiting—we all knew at once that quitting was not an option.

So, I continued on like this for seven hours. Every time I thought we made progress, I would check my watch and find it had only been a couple of minutes. For six hours, it felt like we had six hours left.

When the sun started to rise, we were making our way up the last part of the ridge, about a twenty-minute walk from the summit. Our guide called us over and said, “Look! This is what you came for! The sunrise over Africa.” Honestly, I was over it, and I felt mentally gone. I was not interested in any sunrise. I knew if I stopped, I was going to lie down and never move again. So, while my brother and dad stopped to marvel at the view and tried to take pictures with rather frozen fingers, I kept

walking ahead. I walked for fear of falling forward. I walked because I promised myself I wouldn't look out at the sunrise until I made it. Then, all of a sudden, I found myself standing at the peak.

Over snow-capped mountains and white rumbling clouds, the sun laid out its arms in front of me. It seemed to be beckoning me toward it, inviting me to look upon it in awe. In that moment, it truly felt like I was looking at the golden circle of life.

After a few minutes, our guides rushed over to us. "Quick!" they yelled, "Finish your gazing and pictures; we're heading down."

I paused. *What?*

"We forgot to mention this in the orientation, but you have to go down right after summiting or you'll get altitude sickness." They told us we had 20 minutes to have some biscuits and tea, and then we had to book it or we'd be risking a pulmonary edema, which can be life threatening.

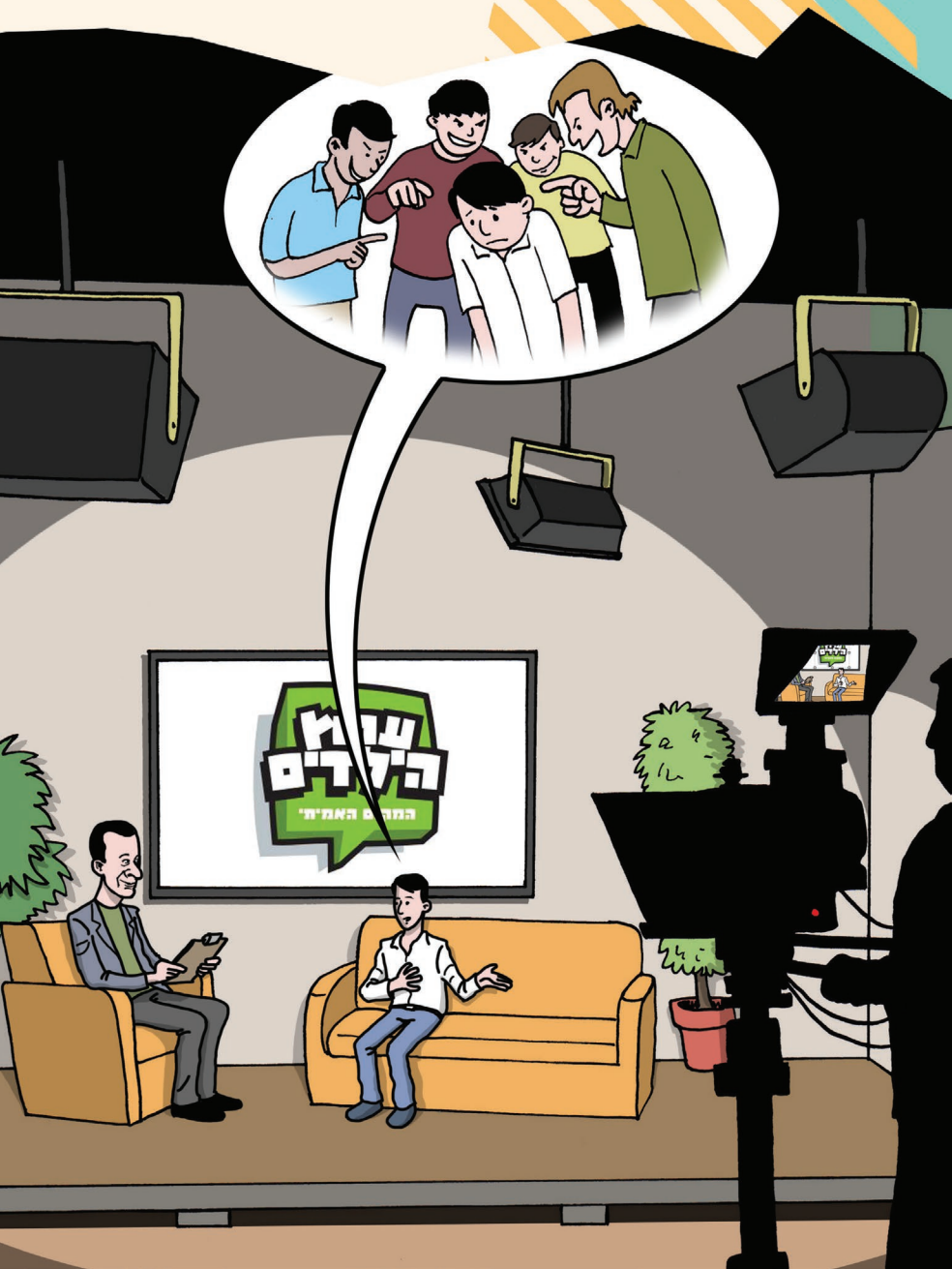
Now, these guys are pretty smart because if they had told us beforehand that we would have to walk back down the seven-hour hike after only a few minutes, we may have never done it in the first place. Nevertheless, we finished our tea and started deliriously running down the mountain. We were reminded how going downhill on a steep slope for three hours can be, at times, as challenging as going uphill. Again, we all thought we wouldn't make it, but we did.

When I look back on this experience, it reminds me of what I keep seeking in goals: exhilarating and difficult journeys that, at each summit, bring new experiences, understanding of my capabilities, and willpower. I took the climb as any climb must be taken: one step at a time.

I set after a goal, and I was never going to let myself quit. Sure, I thought about it, but that wasn't me speaking: It was a physical reaction to the brutal elements I was subjecting myself to. I firmly believe once I start something, I owe it to myself—and others if they are affected—to do my best to finish. There will be times in my life when I will not be able to follow through, maybe because of circumstances I can't control. Still, I try my hardest to lead by example and always attempt to the best of my ability to come through, no matter how hard it is to do so.

So, whether it was about teaching myself a new subject, getting in shape, running a marathon, or climbing a mountain, I could only do it by setting the goal and working persistently toward it one step at a time. Our dreams seem big when we look at them as destinations, but when we look at them as a series of small accomplishments, we realize the destination isn't really as far away as we might have thought. As long as you have the confidence to understand that your dream will still be waiting for you when you reach it, what's the rush? Just keep reminding yourself: one foot in front of the other. Pole pole.

BULLYING



“Let your scars take you forward. They are the best power sources you have.”

Maor Farid, *Fulbright and ISEF Scholar, MIT Postdoctoral Fellow; Founder and CEO, Learn to Succeed*

“I think one of the most important elements for all of us is balance ... finding a way for you to just make sure that you stay in touch with who you are and what’s important to you. That, to me, is a key element of any successful person.”

Laura Lauder, *Lauder Family Venture Philanthropy Fund*

“Be yourself no matter what they say. Not everybody will dig you right away! But that’s OK. Own it.”

Noam Solomon, *CEO, Immunai*

“Believe in yourself. This one always sounds silly, but it is true, especially for you as a young social entrepreneur. You’ll find a lot to be encouraged by and so much more that will cause doubt. Without arrogance or conceit, you’ll need to have a core belief that the impact you want to make in the world matters. It will help shore up resiliency and keep you moving forward.”

Alnisa Allgood, *Founder and Executive Director, Collaboration for Good*

“There is no single path to becoming an entrepreneur. In high school and college, I had believed that my classmates studying economics or entrepreneurship were the ones who would go on to start businesses—not me, the kid who loved humanities, art, and politics. I could not have been more wrong!”

Aaron Tartakovsky *Co-Founder and CEO, Epic CleanTec*

It's a sunny April afternoon, and I'm playing catch with some friends at a local park near our elementary school. My light-up sneakers flash red in the grass as I run. I throw the ball up high in the air, letting out a laugh as it comes down; my best friend, running backward to catch it, trips and falls.

I run over to him. He's not hurt, just embarrassed. I don't hide that I'm laughing, but I know what will make him feel better in an instant.

"Get up!" I yell. "Ice cream!"

We race each other to the ice cream truck at the corner, where my mom scoops me up in her arms for a kiss hello. I rub my cheek—I'm too old for kisses—and now my friend laughs: He has something to tease me for. We grab two ice cream cones and walk back to my house to play *Mario Kart*.

As a kid, I lived the dream. Until third grade, I grew up in Israel, where I felt like one of the happiest third-graders around. I was on many sports teams, and I spent my afternoons exploring and playing with my best friends from school. Right around this time, however, my parents announced to the family that we would be moving to California for a couple years. Even though I had fantastic friends and would be sad to leave them, I was excited for the adventure.

We arrived in Palo Alto, where I started school halfway through third grade. Fortunately, I quickly made friends and adapted well to speaking English, which I hadn't learned before my arrival. However, after two and a half

years, we headed back to Israel. Just as I got adjusted to my new life, I would now return to my old one.

At this point, I had just finished the fifth grade. Though I was self-confident and feeling great at my new school, El Carmelo Elementary in Palo Alto, I was thrilled to return home because I missed my friends deeply. When we moved back to Israel, it was the beginning of the academic year. I couldn't wait to start school in only a couple of days.

On the first day of classes, I combed my hair back and put on a new shirt I had purchased in California. I packed the backpack I had been using for the past couple of months and tied my sneakers with the blue and white shoelaces my Israeli friends and I used to wear back in the day. I practically ran from my front door all the way to class.

When I got to the opening gates of my school, everything flooded back: the swing on the playground that always swung a bit to the right, the second-floor math room where the striped paint chipped at the corners, that one bench in the schoolyard where I used to wait for my older brother to pick me up. It felt like a homecoming.

What I hadn't realized, though, was that in my two years' absence, *I'd* changed. After living in America, my social practices had Americanized as well. My accent was now slightly different, and somewhere along the line, I started combing my hair left instead of right—which for some reason was the trendy thing in Israel. In my first class, when I politely raised my hand to answer a question, everyone laughed at me. I had forgotten that in my class, many just called out the answers as soon as they could. But even with those differences in mind,

when I sat down to eat lunch with my old friends, they'd saved a chair for me.

Over the next couple of weeks, however, something changed. There was no big incident—or even a small, awkward moment—I could pinpoint, but that only made the development more confusing and distressing. I grew increasingly aware that I no longer knew my place at school. My old group of friends started taking out anger on me, seemingly out of nowhere, and they would tease me for what felt like no reason. When I tried to make new friends, I found that I couldn't. Social circles were closing, and I was not in any of them.

Before long, this social exclusion became a cruel and coordinated form of bullying.

In Hebrew, we call this *cherem*, the most severe form of ostracization imaginable. No one speaks to you, you have your food stolen, and you get teased and manipulated everywhere you turn. For no reason, my entire class had launched a crusade against me—and no one dared to break the *cherem* because if they had, they would have been judged to be on “my side.” And then they, too, would have been subjected to bullying.

The worst of it was not the dirt snuck into my food at lunch or the big parties students threw after school for everyone in the class except me. The worst of it was the penetrating feeling that I was insignificant or *unworthy* of anyone's time, attention, or affection. I was made a ghost in the school I once thought of as my home.

Because of my bullying, I know there are 1,200 seconds in 20 minutes. I know this because I counted every second of recess, when the tormenting was at its worst, hoping it would all be over soon so I could slink back into class. Because of the bullying, I learned to keep my

head down in the halls because if I accidentally made eye contact with someone, they would yell something horrible my way. I taught myself how to be silent, how to go unseen.

During this time, I learned to hide the details from my family, but they began to pick up on warning signs at home. When asked how my day was, I would answer, “Fine,” instead of sharing all the things I did, as I used to. At dinner, when I scarfed down my food, my parents looked at me, puzzled.

“Michael! Did you not eat your lunch?” I didn’t tell them that the kids at school had thrown it at me in the schoolyard.

Eventually, it all became too much. I was sitting in the classroom waiting for history to start, and a group of kids—led by my former best friend—surrounded me. They shoved my books on the ground and called me every name they could think of. I jumped up, grabbed my things, and ran out of school sobbing.

My feet didn’t stop until I reached my grandparents’ house. Shocked that I’d shown up halfway through the school day, they quickly took me inside. They called my mother and sister and put me on the phone; through tears, I explained everything. Immediately, my family rushed over to get me.

My mother, upon her arrival, scooped me up in her arms. “I’ll take care of this,” she said. I heard my mother making calls to the teacher, the principal, and even to the parents of the kids who were leading the bullying, trying to implore them to help. I was hugely embarrassed. The teachers and principal told her that while they really wanted to help, it was not something that could be easily resolved. The parents she spoke with

were even less willing to work toward a resolution. They said that bullying should stay strictly between the kids. She was shocked. If the parents were not going to help, the situation wouldn't get better.

"Michael," she said, "starting Monday, you're going to be going to a new school: the American school. Does that sound good?"

I felt like a failure. Could this have also been my fault? But I was so happy never to have to face my class, I could only nod in relief.

That night, my sister, Lian, had her own news to share. She was bullied, too. As a matter of fact, every kid in our family had been bullied in school at some point. She shared her own stories. She told me it was not my fault. I looked up at her with admiration.

"So, we're a bit of a different family!" she said. I smiled.

She continued on: "The one thing that got each of us through our bullying was our support system. You're very lucky to have that same support system, Michael, and there is not an ounce of me that believes you won't get through this. You *will* get through this." I was starting to feel a bit better.

"There are a lot of kids out there, though, who are bullied and don't have the kind of support you have, Michael." I nodded. She was right.

"I think you need to help those kids." Lian, who was working as a journalist for a major TV news channel in Israel at the time, prior to founding her own startup, went on to explain an idea she had been cooking up. There was a new show on national TV that broadcasted news for kids. One of the most famous television hosts in Israel led the segment, and he invited kids on the show as guests from time to time. Usually, kids were invited to

show how they solved a Rubik's Cube or discuss a cool accomplishment, but Lian said it would be a great service to other children like me if I went on the show and spoke about my experience. Hardly anyone spoke about bullying then. Everyone was ashamed to bring it up. It was about time.

Even though I was only ten, and I felt frightened out of my wits to go on TV and admit to the world I had been bullied, I agreed.

When the time came to go live on the segment, I drove with my parents to the studio. I had told my sister my story countless times, and I was prepared to take the leap and share with the world how horrible, devastating, and humiliating it felt to be bullied.

The lights came up, there was a countdown, and then, suddenly, it was go time. I took a deep breath, and I told my story. The thing about being bullied is you don't just get used to being invisible: You get used to being *unheard*. Nobody listens to you, and even when you speak, it's as if only air is coming out of your mouth. To have a channel of listeners and a host of such a renowned show truly want to *hear* me and pay attention to my experiences was invaluable.

I told the kids watching how terrified I was to attend school each day. I told them I had kept quiet for a long time, hoping it would go away, but it only got worse. I told them I thought it was my fault. I figured something was wrong with me, and that was why the other kids teased me, but once I opened up to my family, I realized that wasn't true. And it wasn't true for the kids watching, either. If they could find the courage to open up about their experiences, they would soon come to realize they weren't alone.

Throughout the whole segment, I did not mention my school's name; nor did I name the kids who bullied me most mercilessly. I didn't have to. They knew who they were.

The reactions to the TV segment were incredible. I was too young at the time to follow the online forums, but I was told a meaningful public conversation ensued about an issue that at that time was mostly taboo.

Over the next few years, I would often see the kids who bullied me on the neighborhood streets. We never acknowledged each other. There was an unspoken but understood barrier between us. It's one thing to see the person you're bullying with his head low in the classroom—especially when you have the support of the class—but it's another to see him walk down the street after he's spoken with his head raised high on national TV about what you have done to him. For them, there was no escaping responsibility. I was glad. Maybe it made them think twice before they chose their next target.

Many years later, when I was an officer in the IDF, I reached out to my old best friend—the one who had become the ringleader of the bullying. I asked him to get coffee with me. We met on my neighborhood street, the same one we had run down to play on sunny afternoons all those years ago. We chatted, and I realized how drastically different our two lives had become since parting ways at age ten.

Throughout the whole conversation, neither of us brought up the bullying. We both quietly evaluated each other, and though things remained a bit awkward and tense, inside myself, I was honestly quite comfortable. I came into the conversation holding ranks from the cybersecurity unit, and I was very proud of what I was

doing at the time. It was clear that though he had put me through hell when I was younger, I had made it out to the other side. He, on the other hand, seemed less at ease. He was a bit quieter and more inquisitive than I would have expected from the bully I once knew. Perhaps he had spent some time thinking about the consequences of his actions.

Leaving the conversation, I recognized a newfound pride in myself. I was grateful that somehow as a ten-year-old (with a lot of help from others), I had found the strength to overcome what at that time seemed like a bottomless pit. I was lucky I had been able to attend a new school, a wonderful, inspiring place that fundamentally changed how I interact with the world and gave me so many of the skills and tools that make me who I am today. I was able to make new, lasting friendships. And, most importantly, I was able to discover what it means to be confident in myself without needing validation from others.

Today, I never give much thought to whether I am included in things or whether people like me or not. I simply go about my days reminding myself that if I'm secure in who I am, the rest will fall into place. I tell myself to be attentive and careful with others and seek out the weak if they need help. No one should have to go through what I went through.

I no longer dream the dream of the bullied ten-year-old: the dream of becoming popular. All I really need is a small group of close friends, and I feel like the luckiest guy in the world. No one can bully me again. And I will not tolerate any bullying of others.

The same year I met with my former bully for coffee, I participated in a hackathon with one of my best friends,

Dan Chaitas, in the Wix offices of Tel Aviv. When we arrived, we had not yet decided on what project we would work on for the competition. We were in the ideation process when we noticed two unusual guests roaming the hackathon venue.

A tall woman, holding the hand of a boy around ten, was stopping at every booth and talking to the hackathon participants. It was clear she wasn't part of the hackathon itself, yet we couldn't understand what she was doing. By the looks of it, the other hackers couldn't understand, either. They looked at her skeptically, answering her questions with a shrug, and on to the next booth she went. Finally, she reached ours.

The boy whose hand she held looked rather sad. He stared solemnly at the floor, afraid to make eye contact with us.

"Hi," she said. "What are you working on?"

Dan and I answered that we actually had not come up with an idea yet.

"Well," she said, "This is Itay¹, and he has an idea for an app." She looked down at him and motioned for him to speak.

Quietly, he said, "It's called Happy Days. I want to make a social media app that will help kids going through bullying connect with other children with similar experiences. It's a community." He shared how he himself had been bullied, and I couldn't help but ask for more details. I saw so much of myself and my experience in him. Of course we were going to make the app. There was no question in our minds.

¹ The name used here is a pseudonym.

Now, Itay wasn't a coder, and he couldn't build the app on his own. But he provided mock-ups for us and told us how, as the app's first user, he would want the online community to operate. He took ownership over his story and, inspiring us both, sat with Dan and me for 30 hours to make the application perfect. Really. Even though he was only the height of my ribcage, Itay stuck it out with us the entire hackathon, never sleeping for a moment. There was a certain determination in him that said, *I'm going to work hard so that no one else ever has to go through what I went through.* I understood that focus.

As we started coding, Itay opened up to us more and more. At first, he was self-conscious, wondering why we, as real engineers, would ever want to work with him. As the hours went by, however, his confidence grew, and the more he realized his idea was coming to fruition, the more he wanted to perfect it. He became dedicated to making adjustments for the product.

We added every feature Itay thought would be helpful. We changed the color scheme to make it more inviting, made the font on the welcome page more cartoonish, and added the option for every app participant to create an avatar for themselves. This allowed the users to maintain anonymity by not having to upload a profile picture to the user interface.

As Dan would later say in an interview about our experience working with Itay, "He helped us focus the idea to meet the specific needs of the target market: Kids like himself who are going through hardships. He sat with us the whole time, didn't sleep a moment, and helped us build the application."

In the end, we created a virtual system that connected users with one another within select categories

of hardship. Users could choose from a list of emotional obstacles they might be facing (e.g. “My relationship ended,” “My friends make fun of me,” “I’m struggling in school,” and so on), which Itay selected based on the problems he himself noticed in his school. When a user selected a category, she would immediately become connected with someone else around the world, so both users could share their experiences in complete anonymity. Research has gone to show that when you share your problem with others and they are able to empathize with you, it helps you overcome the problem. This was ultimately the goal of our app. When all was said and done, at the end of it, we ended up winning first place in the hackathon for the Social Good category.

When we won, we pulled Itay onstage. For me, this was a heartfelt closure to my own journey with bullying. To be standing onstage as my new, confident self—an officer in the IDF with engineering skills and an amazing community—next to a boy I saw as the embodiment of my younger self was moving. Over the course of our 30 hours together, I saw some of the sadness in Itay’s eyes replaced with motivation. I hoped he also could see himself in me.

Not too long after the hackathon, Itay, Dan, and I were invited to appear on national television together. We went to tell Itay’s story to give visibility to the issue of childhood bullying that Itay and I both knew so well. We encouraged kids to open up about their experiences and know they are not alone, and that they could use their pain as motivation to help others through theirs.

At one point in the program, Itay described what the app meant to him. He said that lately kids had been bullying him, and he knew there must have been so many

other kids in the same situation. He thought an app would be useful that allowed kids to connect with others their own age and help each other during sad times.

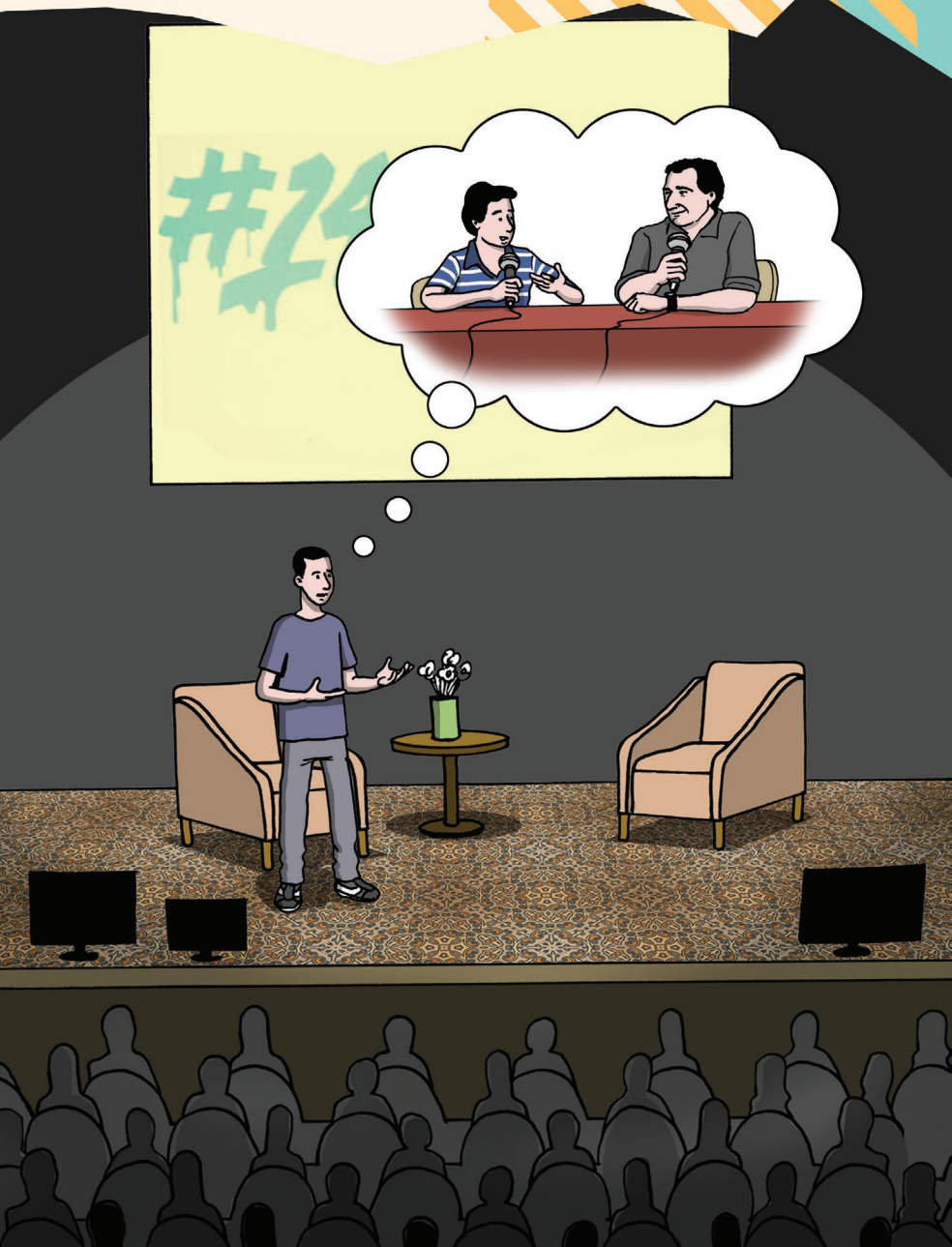
It was incredible for me to watch Itay go public with his story, just like I had done all those years before. I watched him with admiration as he bravely stepped into the spotlight to say: *This is happening, it's not OK, and it's not our fault.*

When the program segment was over, I called Itay over for one last piece of advice. I looked into the eyes of my younger self and said:

“Never give up on yourself. The world needs you Itay.”



COMMUNICATION



“Spend some of your summers working in sales. There isn’t a more important skill you need to begin honing than standing in front of people and trying to convince them to buy from you. One day, when you figure out your passion, you’ll be able to sell it to everyone around you: customers, investors, employees ...”

Gil Ben-Artzy, *Founding Partner, UpWest*

“Use your innocence and naivety to your advantage, looking at the world with fresh eyes and putting yourself in front of an audience as soon as possible to tell your story.”

Yan Chelly, *Vice President Core Business, Fiverr*

“Learn how to master the art of framing. It’s key for every business conversation you’ll ever have.”

Amir Zwickel, *Co-Founder, SHOWFIELDS*

“The number one thing I want many founders to understand is [that] your communication skills in times like this are the most important thing.”

Shuly Galili, *Founding Member, UpWest*

“You have the power to change your narrative. Take control by defining the clear, concise message you want to get across—and then stick to it.”

Pamela Becker, *Co-Founder and Chair, Jeremy’s Circle*

I can feel the heat of the lights as they flood the dark stage. The audience, barely visible from the glare of the spotlight, dissolves into a sea of faces swimming in the dust that dances before my eyes. The female lead makes her way to center stage, her long golden locks flowing behind her as she begins to sing. I am only eight years old, and I come up to her ribcage as she passes me; yet today, I am her artistic collaborator. The music swells, the ensemble begins their opening dance number, the star sings on, and I, just beside her, have never felt more alive. The only problem? I'm playing the tree.

I grew up absolutely addicted to theater, particularly during the time I lived in Palo Alto. Originally, acting was attractive to me because it allowed me to participate in children's programs without speaking much English (it was fairly easy to memorize the sounds and just repeat them), and over time, it helped me learn the language, too. Eventually, however, acting grew into something much more meaningful. Unfortunately, because of my imperfect English (and, as much as it pains me to admit it, somewhat imperfect pitch), I was never the best in the room. When I returned to Israel in fifth grade, I was determined to change this. I signed up for a course called Acting in Front of the Camera, hosted by two of Israel's most beloved television hosts: Kobi Mahat and Miki Geva.

Upon completion of the program, I was given real headshots, a professional agent, and all of the tools to be Israel's next Gal Gadot. During the program, I received

training on how to captivate an audience, emote, and sell my character's goals to those who watched. I learned that, no matter if I was playing a hero or a villain, it was my job to make the audience root for me. Now, I never landed a single professional role, so maybe not many people were rooting for me. I did, however, still have one person who saw great potential in me: my dad.

When I was 13 years old, my father asked me if I wanted to come to a big tech conference with him: the 140 Character Conference, hosted by Jeff Pulver. The event brought together some of the biggest leaders in tech for a weekend of discussion on the most disruptive technological advances of our time. My father asked if I would get onstage with him and answer some questions about what it's like to grow up in the age of technology. So, I'd get to spend the weekend hanging out with a bunch of tech geniuses and maybe miss an afternoon of school? *Hmm, let me think about it* (I said, "Absolutely"). Besides, I had always been passionate about technology, and I wanted to learn more about those who were most successful in the field. Because at this point in my life, having realized that I wasn't going to cut it on Broadway, I decided the only way I'd ever grace the stage was to become filthy rich in another profession and use that money to fund a play. Then they would *have* to put me in it. (Just kidding.)

When the date of the conference arrived, I nervously ironed my blue-and-white collared shirt, combed back my hair, and drove with my dad to the venue. Though stylish for seventh grade (if I do say so myself), when you watch the footage of our talk, you can see I have no clue what I'm doing. I'm nervously holding the microphone with both hands, and my fingers are doing their

own little opening tap number down the side. What still surprises me, however, is that none of that mattered. For the entire duration of the talk, the audience remained engaged and laughing as I answered my dad's questions with an unpracticed 13-year-old charm. When he asked me what life was like before the Web, I replied jokingly, "I don't know!"

When he asked me if I use the chat feature on my phone very often, I said, "Most recently, I used it five minutes ago. These past five minutes have been the longest I've ever gone without using it!" That one really got the baby boomers.

Without even fully realizing it, I was reading the crowd and assuming the role necessary to help get my father's points across. A public speaker's job, just like an actor's, is to captivate, and this cannot be done without close attention to the audience you are trying to engage. Intuitively, I recognized the crowd liked comments that would play up my technology addiction, so I continued along with answers that would hold their attention, all the while staying true to the original intention of my father's and my presentation.

It was a transformative experience for me. Here I was, speaking on a lighted stage in front of an audience, and for once in my life, I had a starring (and human) role! I wasn't ready to stop.

And it looked like others weren't ready for me to stop, either. A week or two after I returned home from that first conference, I found an email waiting for me from Jeff Pulver, the head of the event and a pioneer in voice over IP. The email said:

Dear Michael,

I hope this message finds you well. The 140 team loved the talk you and your father gave this past weekend, and we were wondering if you would like to speak at our 140 conference next year in New York.

I was shocked. I kept reading:

Just one more thing—you would do it alone!

Now, one thing you should understand: My dad is asked to speak at endless conferences, and he is incredibly well known in his field. So, to be asked to speak *without him*, to be valued as a public speaker and not just because of my connection to my father, was an incredible feeling. Without skipping a beat, I immediately signed myself up for the role. Pushing back my desk chair, I rushed downstairs to show my parents the email.

About a year later, on the plane ride to New York, with complimentary peanuts and a plastic cup of ginger ale as my fuel, I stayed up the whole flight relentlessly drilling my lines (to the *slight* annoyance of my fellow passengers). As we touched down, I shook my brother awake so he could give me feedback on my delivery. He sighed. It was going to be a long weekend.

For three days leading up to the conference, I took my act to the streets of New York. What better stage lights to practice under than the billboards of Times Square?

“Hi! How are you all doing today?” I motioned to the guys dressed as Elmo and the Statue of Liberty as I imagined walking onstage.

“I’m here to talk to you about how technology is changing my life.” My brother, thinking it better that I rehearse in a quiet space, pulled me toward a less-crowded spot by the East River.

On the way back to the hotel, I was so entranced in drilling minute four of my speech that I almost walked

head-on into incoming Park Avenue traffic. My brother grabbed my shoulder and saved me from an untimely passing. I agreed I would stick to rehearsing in our hotel room.

Throughout that weekend, my brother proved monumental in helping me stay calm, cool, and collected, all the while helping me nail my speech. At the time, he had just graduated from Juilliard with a degree in classical piano, and he was studying at NYU Tisch for his master's in musical theater composition. Being an incredible performer himself, he was key in helping me articulate my message. He spent hours with me writing and revising my work, helping perfect the message I wanted to convey. I could not have asked for a better editor, confidant, one-man audience, and friend. I have always looked up to him, but in these moments especially, his presence and attentiveness meant the world to me.

When the day of the conference finally came, I was shaking with excitement. As my brother showered in the morning, I hung up my red collared shirt, fit for a leading actor, on the hotel bathroom door to steam. Everything had to be perfect. We took the subway to the venue, and I was dead silent for the entire commute. Honestly? I was terrified. I had never stood in front of an audience alone before, and it was in a freaking New York City conference center! My heart was racing, my blood was pumping, and I was starting to have hallucinations of the Elmos from Times Square. When we got to the venue, I was shaking all over and was certain I would pass out on stage. I ran through my speech 47 times before we reached the front doors of the event. Finally, it was time to go on.

“Hi! How are you all doing today?”

We're goo—

“Great, great, I’m so glad to be here.” I had practiced my lines (without a responsive audience) so to the letter that I had forgotten to leave time for crowd responses. Oops.

“All of you came here to learn about the way tech is changing the world, so I came to speak about how it’s changing my life. I can assume that when you guys were younger, there were only two ways to communicate with one another—phones, and—well, if you had phones when you were younger—” People in the audience began to heckle me, laughing alongside me as I chuckled. I started over.

“OK, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” Terrified, I began telling my story about how technology has revolutionized education. The story began:

“Last year, I actually came to New York for my brother’s graduation.” I paused and turned to my brother in the crowd:

“Congrats, man!” A few chuckles pinged across the auditorium. A few moments earlier, when the crowd had laughed at my first joke, my subconscious had picked up that they were responsive to humor. My line delivery had changed accordingly. I continued with these small comedic asides for the rest of the speech to keep the crowd engaged.

“Unfortunately, during his graduation weekend, back in Tel Aviv there was a major review session for a math test critical to my final grade. It was crucial for me to be there, so I was brainstorming with some of my friends: How could I be both in Israel and New York at the same time? Yes, yes, I know it’s quite impossible. But that’s when my smart friend Ryan Harden said, ‘Why don’t

you just *video chat* into the review?” (This was something, I should add, that during those years was not common at all. Certainly not in school.) “So, at 4 a.m. in New York, I opened up my computer and made a Skype call to my friend who was sitting in class in Israel. Not only was I able to be an active member of the class, but I even managed to participate more than usual because I had a guaranteed front-row seat! Not to mention the slightly robotic nature of my computerized voice gave me an extra flare that allowed me to stand out amongst my classmates.” Once again, the crowd laughed. If only the kids from my middle school production of *Romeo and Juliet* (I played the dagger) could see me now.

At the end of my talk, I headed offstage and gave my brother a massive hug. I felt such a rush coming off my performance that I almost expected him to hand me flowers. The whole experience had felt so uncannily like acting that I almost forgot the conference was not a play. I explained my confusion to my brother over dinner that night. As we chowed down on thin crust New York pizza, I laid out my theory.

“Think about it! When you’re acting, you have to read the room and instantaneously adjust how you connect with your audience. Your lines never change, of course, but the way you *deliver* them does.” My brother, knowing this well from his personal experience, nodded.

“If you want to get your audience to listen to you, be it to your character or your PowerPoint, you need to appeal to their interests. In a matter of seconds, you have to find what makes them tick and capitalize on it.”

I only got better at this tool as I continued with both acting and public speaking. The following year, I was invited to speak again, and I didn’t stop there. I attended

the Digital Life Design (DLD) conference in Munich, and I began speaking to teenagers around Israel about engineering and robotics. I always relished the opportunity to be on my own version of a stage, even if only for a few minutes.

A great public speaking life hack I learned along the way, however, was that what you're saying may not always even be the most important part! I started volunteering by giving lectures at my grandfather's retirement home, and I would give the audience speeches and PowerPoint presentations on virtually anything I could find that I thought might interest them. One time, I gave a talk about global warming and used Al Gore's public online slides as my material. More than the content of the slides, the toothy grin I received from the 87-year-old woman in the front row when I cracked a joke halfway through my presentation and the whispery comment, "You've made me feel relevant again," from the quiet 90-year-old man who sat at the back will stay with me forever. Using the theater tools I was taught, I tried to make these lectures to this very special audience interesting and relevant.

I have learned that for me, a successful lecture presentation, whether to thousands of business people in New York or to elderly people in an old-age home, meant that I was able to let the audience lose themselves for an hour, absorbed in the material they came to hear. Of course, the facts were the critical part, but I learned that if I was able to try and present them in a more interesting manner (sometimes using theatrical tools), the lecture would likely be more successful. At the retirement home, I often did this by relating the current events I spoke about to my audience's grandchildren. In Israel,

legacy is incredibly important, so I was sure to connect my material to one of the things they cared most about. For example, when I described changes in the Israeli education system, I explained how they might affect their grandson going to university in Tel Aviv. Or when I presented on climate change, I made the issue more urgent by expressing how it would affect their granddaughter or great-granddaughter in the future.

You also learn through necessity how to connect with your audience: Many times you will lose their attention unless you find what draws them in specifically. This means you take your one story and create from it a Rashomon: delivering your speech a thousand different ways in order to captivate different audiences. How you appeal to kids, executives, or your grandfather's retirement home companions will all be drastically different. I have learned that if you want to be the strongest public speaker you can be, it is important to try to modify the lecture to the relevant audience, take the temperature of the room, and turn the dial one or two degrees to fine-tune yourself—the main character—and your plot accordingly.

An interesting experience I had while implementing this lesson was when I was asked to give a TEDx Talk on “Why Every Teen Should Run a Startup.” Every time I was asked to give this speech to different demographics, I found myself having to modify it quite a bit. I first spoke about the subject, even before it became a TEDx Talk, at the retirement home, emphasizing to my quite elderly audience that they should encourage their grandchildren to found startups so that they could experience this changing technological world and be innovators like their grandparents, who founded the state of Israel from

scratch. When I transformed the talk to a TEDx format and presented to high schoolers in Palo Alto, however, I focused on how, even though they think they are busy with AP exams and college applications, founding a startup is actually incredibly practical for a high school student, who often has more time on her hands—and valuable skills—than she realizes. Switching it up yet again, I performed the speech in Tel Aviv, where I convinced younger kids how *fun* it would be to start their own businesses. Each time, I altered my tone, delivery, and emphasis in order to find what could capture my audience's attention and imagination. Then I used it to get them to stay engaged with my material.

But it wasn't just about connecting with an audience: *Every* aspect of performing arts equipped me with different tools, whether I was engaged in public speaking, entrepreneurial work, or in different leadership positions. Some of the strongest tools I received were from musical theater.

I was walking downstairs one day in high school, my scuffed Adidas shoes kicking up the dust that often settled on the stairs near the gym. All of a sudden, a friend tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Michael! We're putting on a production of *Mamma Mia!* We desperately need someone to play Pepper. You should come!"

I told her, "Absolutely," and I met her at lunch to go to our school's auditorium. When I got to the room, there were tons of kids lined up in front of the director, Liran Yaacobi. I immediately recognized the extremely talented Rodrigo Alfaro, a good friend of mine who had been a part of every school production since the fifth grade. I wasn't even sure what *Mamma Mia!* was. Was I auditioning to be in a play about a mother missing in

action? I couldn't be sure. Nonetheless, when I saw my friends were going to be a part of it, I knew I wanted to be, too. So, along with every other kid there, I got up on stage and received my namecard. It said: *Michael, playing Pepper*.

For the next couple of months, we worked tirelessly to prepare an incredible show. I drilled lines walking to class and sang the show's opening number in the shower. And yes, I also discovered I could not have been more wrong about the plot of the musical. Though the show itself was a fantastic experience, what was even more valuable was what it taught me about collaboration in the workplace—and how a good leader can turn a cast of strangers into family.

Seeing how our director built such a deep level of trust and respect among all members of the cast was invaluable. When you're on stage exchanging lines and passing the spotlight to one another, you need to have a seamless ebb and flow. The number one rule in improv exemplifies this idea nicely. It's the rule of *yes, and*, meaning whatever your scene partner says, you accept it and, more importantly, give something back in return. Each new exchange takes the scene that much further. The trust between the actors, putting themselves out there in the spotlight, is critical.

And, as an entrepreneur, what better lesson could I learn than how to communicate with people in a constructive way? Acting gave me the outlet to explore how to succeed at this and, also, how to fail.

When I was a commander, I would lead stand-up meetings (regular morning meetings, nothing of stand-up comedy about them) every day. These were often some of the most dreaded hours in the army for

most soldiers, as everyone mundanely anticipated their day for the group. From the fabulous director of my high school arts program, however, I had learned the power of *yes*, *and* to draw energy out of my fellow soldiers and deliver it back to them, amplified.

In my meetings, I encouraged people to use this style of conversation, which invited everyone to participate. It would often flow as follows:

“I am starting this new project.”

“Yes, and you might need help on that, might I join?”

“Yes, and Tamir, you too?”

“Yes, and I need help on a different project, too,” and so on. The style helped every person in the meeting stay engaged, not only because it meant we couldn’t shoot other people’s ideas down, but also because it required everyone to listen closely and to add something of their own to the conversation.

Because one of the main problems with the frequent meetings was that they often felt mundane and repetitive, I made sure to apply the lessons I learned in theater and the “tricks” I learned there to keep an audience engaged to my own announcements as well. I would remind myself to change the order in which I would make announcements, or I’d ask a fellow soldier to make the announcements instead. I found that even simple changes like these ones ensured that information was coming at the group in a different way every day, making it that much more interesting to listen to.

Another theater trick that came in handy when leading meetings was that if you can’t change the content, try to change the location. I would switch up where we had meetings, often bringing my fellow soldiers outside. I learned that it’s not just the material you are presenting

but also *how* you are presenting it. This is also why I made my meetings “stand-up” meetings. I found that when you force everyone to stand up, you can, many times, get more energy flowing, and people will naturally be more open and excited about what you have to say. If this isn’t an option, I found that using immersion techniques can be invaluable.

I was first inspired to incorporate immersive storytelling into my speeches thanks to, you guessed it, a musical. In *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812*, a 12-time Tony-nominated show, Dave Malloy brings to life parts of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. My brother Or was the music director of the show, playing the piano and conducting on the Broadway stage every evening while the musicians and actors danced, acted, and played music from within the audience. It was a truly immersive experience. The musical tells part of the complicated Tolstoy story in such a captivating way that anyone could watch and enjoy it time and again and feel part of the 19th century era and plot. To me, this is the magic of performance: taking something perhaps inaccessible to many, or maybe even uninteresting to some, and turning it into a larger-than-life experience that your audience can’t help but be an exhilarating part of.

By energizing the air in an environment, you can inspire those around you to care about whatever it is you’re speaking about. This especially works when you feel passionate about the material at hand, and you’re convinced it’s meaningful and exciting.

I found all these different tools so helpful to me throughout many situations. They were helpful when I was 17 and had to convince other teenagers to join my startup without pay while inviting them to share my

enthusiasm. They were also helpful when I organized my first hackathon, and I wanted to convince kids from East Palo Alto, some of whom had never owned laptops, to believe they had the potential to become coding whizzes, as I believed they did. And these tools were certainly helpful when I had to persuade my brilliant performing arts teachers Liran Yaacobi, Jonathan Minke, and Ross Fishman (the drama, band, and choir teachers) to devote time to work with me during lunch periods so I could participate in the performing arts shows. (I couldn't take their classes at the scheduled times because I had packaged my days with STEM subjects.) I let my enthusiasm shine and told them that I had been playing saxophone since I was eight and I had been singing for as long as I could talk. I promised them that I would work tirelessly to learn the material by showtime and that I would do anything they asked, if they would please let me participate in their programs. Seeing a kid passionate about the arts, they gladly agreed and coached me outside class time. I still go back to them for advice and inspiration even today. Little did I know they would be giving me life skills that serve me in everything I do.

The performing arts have taught me confidence, have given me tools to engage a crowd, and have helped me collaborate more dynamically—all of which have helped me in taking on tasks that otherwise may have been much more difficult on my own. They gave me confidence when delivering the valedictory speech in high school, when giving a TEDx Talk in Palo Alto, or when, at 19, I found myself speaking before thousands at a conference in Slovenia on teen power and how kid entrepreneurs can change the world. And I did it with the prime minister of Slovenia sitting in the front row.

For me, perhaps the two most magnificent examples of appealing to an audience come from shows that I was lucky to see on Broadway, the recent productions of the musicals *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* and *Hamilton*. These shows were able to bring to life parts of literature and history that many of us (including me) would perhaps have missed out on. I already touched on the first, but let me talk about *Hamilton*.

In *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda manages to take something that to some, perhaps many teenagers, may be uninteresting and make it magical. He takes parts of U.S. history, which may be hard to learn or follow, and turns them into exciting theater. In some pieces, he even takes the same texts, the same speeches, and the same words that high schoolers groan over and turns them into something those same students want to listen to hundreds of times over. In the song “One Last Time,” for example Lin-Manuel has performers read Washington’s resignation speech. I’ve listened to it so many times I now know it by heart.

So, one day, when you’re preparing for your own stand-up meetings, your Tuesday PowerPoints, or even your pitch to the top VCs—try to make every word as interesting and captivating as the *Hamilton* soundtrack.

Now, *that’s* what I call performing arts.



Hacking Generation Y



“The best crisis management is to avert the crisis in the first place. And so, that means a lot of thinking about where the potential crises are.”

David Demarest, *Stanford Graduate School of Business Professor; former White House Senior Staff*

“You will make mistakes. What matters is how quickly you recover from them. Get comfortable making decisions. Paralysis is not a path to success.”

Laura Smoliar, *Founding Partner, Berkeley Catalyst Fund*

“Do things you are passionate about—this is the best way to live a satisfying, successful, and, most importantly, happy life. Oh, and practice Yoga. :)”

Mor Chen, *Investor, Accel; Board Member, 8200 Alumni Association*

“My advice is that the most important quality in life is perseverance. Everyone will face a lot of challenges, especially in the path of entrepreneurship. It’s like a roller coaster: You are going through ups and downs. If you are strong, and you keep going even in the tough times, you’ll succeed in the end. If you can enjoy the ups and downs, and you have the right perspective to learn from the road and take the best out of each experience, it’s even better.”

Moshe Friedman, *Co-Founder and CEO, KamaTech*

“Prepare yourself mentally to face very difficult situations and failures. When they come, embrace them—don’t view them as something you did wrong. Consider them part of your learning and development. You are now a better version of yourself as you move ahead.”

Ronny Morad Levavi, *Software Engineer, Facebook*

Imagine you're on a plane, and suddenly it starts free-falling. Everyone starts panicking and screaming. There is chaos all around. As some passengers inevitably become violent and others prepare to make their final calls home, the pilot's voice comes over the PA system. The plane has had a malfunction, he explains, but it will be secure and safe within a few minutes. People will still be frantic, sure, but a baseline level of security will have returned to quell the chaos. Now, imagine the pilot leaves the cockpit and starts bawling and screaming alongside everyone else. Not exactly reassuring, huh? Once everyone sees the person in charge freak out, there's no doubt they'll panic even more.

In situations of distress and adversity, all eyes turn to the person in charge. How that leader handles the situation dictates the group's response. If she handles it with composure, calm, and maturity, it's very likely the group will remain composed as well. If, however, the boss panics, all hell may break loose.

But what does effective, level-headed leadership look like? To a large extent, this is something we must learn for ourselves, as all leaders bring different sets of strengths to the table.

I found myself, at a relatively early age, having to learn the lessons of being responsible for a group in a time of relative chaos.

At 16, I was captain of my high school's robotics team. It was the second year I had been on the team and my first in charge. To prepare for the competition, we spent

six weeks building a robot that specialized in climbing. In competitions, the robot would be tasked with climbing its way up a three-story pyramid made of PVC pipes. Our robot worked by using mechanical arms that hooked onto the next level in the pyramid and hoisted the body of the robot up, pipe by pipe. By the time we were done constructing our climbing machine, we were one of only two teams in all of Israel that had managed to get the ascending mechanics right.

Because of our robot's climbing abilities, we performed relatively well in our local competitions. Nearing the end of the competition season, we finally reached the quarterfinals. We were ecstatic. The event, which took place over a school break, was right in Tel Aviv. We did not have to travel far, but the adventure felt like the journey of a lifetime. We were all revved up and ready to go.

For the matches, two teams of three robots were pitted against each other. Each robot specialized in either Frisbee throwing or climbing. Whichever team scored the most points would win the match. Points were obtained either by successfully getting Frisbees into a goal or by your robot climbing beyond certain benchmarks. When we got there, we met our other team members (the other two robots playing on our team) and headed into our matches. We were quite successful, and before we knew it, we were in the final round of the quarterfinals.

Halfway through our final match, the score was 1-1. My friend, Fred, and I were in charge of "driving" our pyramid-climbing robot, robotics-speak for controlling its moves. It felt somewhat like playing a video game but with a complex controller that wasn't very intuitive to use. It took us weeks of training to learn to "drive" the

robot and make it move, climb, turn, and react to our immediate, different commands. This would intensify our crisis later on.

There were only seconds on the clock, and thousands of spectators sat in the audience. Every member of both teams sat with their fingers crossed and eyes like daggers on their team's prized robot. The thing about robotics is you never really know if something is about to go horribly wrong. So, all we could do was try our best, pray, and wait.

Unfortunately, the judge called a foul. One of our team's robots crossed into the marked "red zone," which incurred us a significant penalty. Because we were ahead by just two points, the penalty meant the other team won. We were not going to make it to the semifinals after all. We took a deep breath: The journey was over for us and the robot we had spent months building. We all got ready to pack up and part ways. Fred, my co-driver, was an international student from Germany. He had a flight home that night, and with no other competition in sight, he immediately left to catch a train to the airport. The rest of us headed to the area in the back of the stadium where we had left our things, talking quietly amongst ourselves, disappointed. We were on our way out when we heard a voice come over the stadium's intercom:

"Attention! There was a miscalculation during the last match. In the previous match, a foul was issued on the leading team. That foul was mistakenly assigned too high a point value.. When calculated correctly, the foul brings the score to a tie. There will be a rematch in five minutes."

A rematch?! In FIVE minutes?! We all froze. We were excited, of course, but also terrified for two big reasons.

First, at the conclusion of the previous match, we had discovered that our robot was malfunctioning, but we did not take the trouble to fix the malfunction since it was all over anyhow. Second, remember that one of our drivers, Fred, was already on his way to catch a train? While hundreds of students from our school cheered in the audience, we knew we were screwed.

Both of these problems might have been fixed with more time, but we were told the five-minute start to the next match was strict. If we were not in the arena by then, the opposing team's victory would hold. We quickly called Fred and explained the situation. "Do you think you can make it back?"

The pause he took before speaking told us all that we needed to know.

"I'm already twenty minutes away."

We were disappointed to lose Fred, but still, all hope wasn't lost. Five minutes might just give us enough time to fix the robot. I turned to our lead engineer, Waverly Harden, who was kneeling in front of our masterpiece and tinkering with its hind legs. She looked up and shook her head: A five-minute fix would be impossible. Half of our team, defeated, sat down, waiting for the torturous five minutes to be over. But I wasn't about to give up so quickly. I took a deep breath and put my hands on the shoulders of our lead programmer and associate graphics designer. With no more than a glance, I got up and calmly made my way to the judges' stand. Although my team didn't know exactly what I had planned, I acted in a way that restored faith that things could be effectively managed. That was enough to help my team shift gears from a mindset of defeat to one of determination.

Meanwhile, at the judges' stand, I started asking endless questions about the rules and regulations of the game.

"Is there *any way* we can have more than five minutes? Are there any special rules for broken robots? Can we negotiate with the other team and *both* take a bit of extra time to strategize?" I was frantically trying to find something.

Hurrying back to consult with our team mentors, they suggested I check on the possibility of a time-out. I ran over and asked the judge.

The judge paused at that question and looked something up on his computer.

"Oh," he said. "It looks like your team hasn't used your timeout yet. You can do that now if you'd like. It's 15 minutes."

With precious new time on our hands, our team sprung into action. I put someone in charge of contacting Fred, who said he could take a taxi back just in time, and I instructed some teammates to help Waverly. Suddenly, we had a new lifeline, and this was possible only because in the most stressful moments, we didn't panic. We came together as a team and brainstormed calmly. The extra time allowed us to reexamine our problems with a cool head. Fred, for example, hadn't even thought of taking a taxi back until we had given him a few extra minutes to figure out how he could get back to the arena. Eventually, with 30 seconds left until the competition, Waverly fixed the robot and gave us a thumbs-up.

We all sprinted to the arena and turned to the door, praying Fred would come rushing in. Right on cue, he did. The show was about to begin.

Unfortunately, we lost the re-match and we were disqualified just as before. As a team, however, we could not have felt more different. This time, we perceived the loss not as a loss but rather a victory over an insanely pressurized situation. We felt like we were thrown inside a crashing plane—and we landed it. The game was close, and the score was one of our best of the season, but that wasn't what we were most proud of. We grew as a team because we came together against the odds.

For me, this became an incredible lesson on how to lead in times of crisis: calm, cool, and collected. If I had not used my time to reason with the judges, we wouldn't have made it to the final match. I am not sure how I kept my composure, but it certainly taught me a life lesson for the future. Being a strong leader is all about staying calm and leading your team by example so they can perform in a collected manner as well. This lesson served me well when I attempted to put on a hackathon at my old high school.

At the age of 18, after a year of running an organization that created hackathons for high schoolers around the world, I was finally able to host one at home in Tel Aviv. I constructed a dream team of five techies to take on the task: Waverly, Iddo, Mickey, Shir, and myself.

After months of meticulous planning, my high school was ready to kick off the big event. It was the night before, and we could practically see the hundreds of teens who would be lined up outside the gym door the next morning. Unfortunately, there were two major problems.

The day before the hackathon started, we discovered there was only one outlet plug in the entire gym. This would be a major issue for any gathering of teenagers, let

alone a 500-person hackathon. So, I did what I needed to do.

I laid out a clear plan for my team. We went to an electricity company and purchased 100 extension cables, allowing us to take the one outlet plug and multiply it. I delegated locations to each team member, who then would run their cables across their section of the gym and tape them to the floor. I had Iddo rearrange carpets and Waverly move tables while Mickey, Shir and I moved just about every piece of gym equipment available to make sure our hackers wouldn't trip over the cables. Finally, everything was set. Until 12 hours before the event.

That evening, at around 10 p.m., the school's facility manager came into the gym and announced we had to dismantle the extension cables. A certified electrician didn't set them up, so they needed to go. We stared at him in disbelief. *Was he serious?*

I'll admit, I was ready to pounce. Having been the primary organizer of this hackathon for months, and having just maintained my cool for the entirety of the initial cable fiasco, I was furious that one seemingly small issue was about to take down the whole event. Luckily, I was not leading alone. Right as I was about to lose my temper, Waverly quickly chimed in that of course the manager's request made sense because if anything was wrong with the cables, we would have an unimaginably large liability on our hands. This was, after all, an event for high schoolers taking place *at* a high school. She agreed with the manager, shook his hand, and told him we would find an electrician to make sure that every cable was properly configured.

I pressed my palms to my eyes, practically blacking out from exhaustion.

“Come on,” Waverly said. “We can do this.”

Just hearing a member of my team, someone who knew exactly how tired and depleted we all were, say *we can do this* and truly mean it was invaluable. We sprang into action.

Wanting to sort this out as quickly as possible, we immediately began contacting electricians. I made phone calls while Iddo got us all coffee. Each of us helped fill each other’s gas tanks any time we saw a team member running on empty. By leaning on each other, all of us were able to remain calm and level-headed throughout the chaos of the night.

We finally found an electrician, and after two hours, he was able to come in. He went through every cable—cracking them open on the floor and readjusting their internal alignments. When he finally finished, it was about 2 a.m. We thanked the electrician and sent him home. Then, the high school facilities manager came back in.

Smiling, we all motioned to the cables. They looked great, he told us, but still, he was shaking his head. The work wasn’t *signed off* by a certified electrician. Sure, an electrician may have installed them, but had he accepted liability for his work? If we didn’t want the facilities manager to dismantle our setup, we needed to get a certified electrician who could take on greater liability to come in and re-check every cable.

Now, my team was typically a relatively calm bunch, but our patience was being tested. Anger aside, it was clear that we all felt the deepest sense of disrespect for this man. *Why didn’t he say this before?* His disregard

for us felt deliberate and cruel. As we descended into deflated groans and complaints, Iddo walked into the center of the circle: “Hey, are you guys going to quiet down? I need to call my dad.”

We all immediately started laughing: Of course! Iddo’s dad was an electromechanical engineer with a PhD. Just when we were about to break down, one of our team members saved the day yet again by keeping their cool.

So, at 2 a.m., Iddo called his dad and begged him to drive an hour to come see us. Iddo’s father meticulously checked every cable (as he was thus taking responsibility for the event), and right around 8 a.m., he began finishing up.

Outside our doors, we could hear the buzz and vibration of 500 high schoolers. I, for one, couldn’t wait to feel the raw energy again that I had felt at my first hackathon in Palo Alto. When Iddo’s father finally completed his evaluation, he gave us the go-ahead, and we all lined up as if reporting for duty as the high school facilities manager came back in. When I handed him the signed certificate, I expected him to ask us to get the director of NASA down there to sign. Instead, he finally gave us what we had wanted all along: a thumbs-up.

We opened the doors and kicked off the hackathon. When all was said and done, I began reflecting back on how we had all handled the situation. We had been angry, furious even, and yet somehow, through each other’s support, we had managed to maintain our group composure for the greater benefit of the team. We were all able to gauge what our other team members needed from us at every point in time and then give it to them, all the while knowing that they would soon return the favor.

When one of us who had been leading began to lose their cool, as we all do from time to time, another one would step in to lead the group out of chaos and toward order. I realized this experience had tried me in a different way. While in the robotics competition, I managed to stay in cool control throughout the crisis, but here in the hackathon, it proved more difficult and the team members pitched in and helped me stay cool. Clearly I was very lucky to have such team members. But a valuable lesson for me, which I later applied in situations in the IDF and elsewhere, was that as a team leader, I have the responsibility to keep cool and composed through a crisis, no matter how long it takes. I want to have a team that I can rely on for help, but I also have a responsibility on my own. But the story didn't end here. Unfortunately, there was still one more challenge we would face during the hackathon.

Before the event, we had underestimated the number of devices that were going to connect to the WiFi. We had planned for 500 devices: a laptop for each participant. However, the night before the hackathon, as we were doing the final preparations in the gym, we realized that all of our phones were going to be connected to the hackathon WiFi as well. And since we were underground, it was actually *impossible* for us—or any of the participants—to rely on data. Therefore, the number of devices we needed to host instantly doubled, not to mention that most of the participants would be coming with additional tablets for their work. Bottom line: We knew that the current system wouldn't hold.

Since we had experience problem-solving at many hackathons before, we handled this calmly. We immediately brought in an external connectivity company, and

the event started (after the long night of electricity antics) without a hitch—or so we thought. Unfortunately, the company had never handled an event of this scale, and the WiFi ended up shutting down within ten minutes of the event.

Thankfully, what began to look like a massive disaster actually ended up being one of the most inspiring moments of the hackathon. Rather than posing the WiFi issue as a major problem, I framed it as an opportunity for everyone in the room to work together. Within minutes, we had participants and mentors from every corner of the room collectively brainstorming a solution. High schoolers worked alongside WiFi electricians to mitigate the problem, and eventually, by placing access points in strategic locations and reprogramming the default bandwidth allocation logic, we were able to solve it.

In success, there will always be moments of pandemonium. There might be times when, as a leader, you are able to maintain a level head yourself, like during my robotics competition or the WiFi fiasco, but these are rare moments. More likely, you will need to rely on your fellow teammates from time to time to help bring the calm.

I carry these lessons with me everywhere I go. I had to keep my cool on a daily basis as a commander in the IDF, leading teams through missions where, in a matter of moments, life-or-death decisions had to be made. At those times, I managed to calmly turn to my colleagues and say, “This is the problem; let’s go to work on it.” But the lesson of learning to accept help from a teammate also serves me today. Every day in my life as a venture capital associate, when multimillion-dollar deals have to be made, I turn to my colleagues for guidance. In chaos,

it's OK to lead alone, and it's OK to lead as a team; what's important is that you lead with a level head.

So, whether it's a robotics malfunction or a split-second IDF cybersecurity decision, make sure you are the calm pilot over the loudspeaker. And if for some reason it's not your day and you can't be—that's OK, too. Just make sure you have a rock-solid flight crew to help you steer the plane back to safety.

ETHICS



THINK LIKE A
PROTON
STAY POSITIVE

WE NEED
TO DO
THE RIGHT
THING

Hacking
Generation Y



“Always choose partners with decent intelligence with integrity and tenacity over brilliance alone; you will sleep better at night. Never trade time for money.”

Marc Abramowitz, *Angel Investor*

“There’s always a class or two about ethics or social implications, and I think we just need to weave that teaching all the way through each discipline to be sure we’re making responsible, ethical choices at every step.”

Julie Zelenski, *Senior Lecturer, Stanford University*

“Build a world where what you say is totally aligned with what you do, demonstrating the kind of integrity that will attract people to support you in whatever endeavor you choose.”

Sheryl Chamberlain, *Global Alliances, Coupa Software; Chair, Hult Prize Council*

“Stay in touch with your inner compass. Leaving its guidance will always have a cost.”

Rafael Cosman, *Co-Founder and CEO, TrustToken*

“Be a mensch.”

Zack Bodner, *CEO, Oshman Family, JCC*

There is a famous quotation by Albert Einstein that reads, “Try not to become a man of success but rather to become a man of value.” For me, these are guiding words. After all, what is praiseworthy about a successful CEO if he has stepped over his fellow people to reach the top? This, of course, is much easier said than done, and I believe a person’s true moral compass is only revealed when tried. There was one pivotal point in my young entrepreneurial life that well demonstrated this challenge to me. It took place when I was just 18.

I’m standing in the back of my high school gym: 500 students from across Israel are sprawled out on the linoleum floor, clicking their pens and tapping their feet in nervous anticipation. Remember that hackathon I talked about before, the one that kept us up checking cables until 8 a.m.? We’re nearing the end of it now, some sleepless 30 hours later, and everyone is anxious to know the top ten teams that will advance to the next round of the competition. We’re anxious, too, and needless to say, we’re all eager to get some rest. The only problem? We can’t figure out who the top ten teams are. The app we use to tally judges’ scores is mysteriously glitching.

“Let’s move it! We have to be out of here in half an hour!” the building managers shout at us, waving their arms. We’re running out of time. Kids are getting more and more restless, gathering their things and preparing to leave with the scores unannounced. Our judges, leading technologists who have commuted quite far to

volunteer their time to our hackathon, are itching to wrap up the day.

“Let’s go!” the whole gym seems to be shouting. My team and I look at each other, concerned.

Let me give some more context to the situation. Our hackathon was set up to take place in two judging rounds. In the first round, judges visited every team’s booth and evaluated their engineering projects, giving them scores based on their exhibited skill and creativity. In the second round, the top ten teams competed against each other in a *Shark Tank*-style pitch competition. The winner of the hackathon would then be chosen from those pitches.

Prior to the event, our team sat down to discuss how we could make the judging process as fair as possible. We determined that because an engineering project is usually in a specialized field, the opinions of judges whose expertise was most relevant to the project should be weighted more strongly than the opinions of others. As a result, these weights would change depending on both the project and the judging team. For example, one of our judges was the inventor of the flash drive, so his opinion on a project handling storage-centered hardware would count for more than a judge whose expertise was in biotechnology.

In order to record all of the judges’ scores and keep track of their respective weights, we had every judge fill out scorecards on Google Forms for each team they assessed. Knowing it would be impossible for us to manually check each scorecard on the day of the hackathon, we had a team member write a program to output the top ten teams based on the judges’ scores.

Unfortunately, because we had been so preoccupied with organizing the hackathon, no one on our team actually ran the “Judges Scoring” program until the day of. By that, I mean until the moment we needed it to work. An oversight that would nearly cost us our reputations.

From our table in the front of the gym, our team member runs the scoring program script. Something’s wrong. He runs it again. Something’s wrong again. He pushes the computer toward us.

“I don’t know. It could be right, but I’m not sure. Something’s wrong here.”

Mickey, who was running the hackathon with me, looks my way. Our hearts drop.

500 students, 50 judges, 30 sponsors. That’s 1,160 eyes looking directly at us, waiting to hear the scores. We quickly run the program again and again. Nothing changes. It’s not that it isn’t working, per se, but rather that we can’t be *sure* it’s working. When the program runs, the output formatting of the top ten teams is different than the format we had originally planned. That is the first sign. Now, this could just be a design issue, or it could mean our program isn’t functional. We aren’t sure.

We turn to Mickey and ask him to have his brother, David, an engineer and a former Google employee, look at the code.

David agrees and spends a few minutes looking at it. He shakes his head. It might work, it might not—just what we had suspected.

We all look up at each other.

“You have 60 seconds to figure this out!” someone from the maintenance staff yells, pointing at the computer. We need to leave the venue so the school can start preparing the gym for the next morning’s 8 a.m. class.

“What’s taking so long?” a kid shouts. We huddle as a team. I feel the blood pounding in my ears.

“I think we should just use it,” someone says.

“No way! Are you crazy? Tell them we need more time.”

The whole group, divided as to what to do, looks at me. When it comes down to it, this is my venture. I have to make the call.

I run the program a couple more times. There’s no use: It’s not possible during this short time to be absolutely sure whether it’s working correctly. But everyone is waiting for the results, and they’re going to close the venue. I have to make a split-second decision. I tell my teammates we should use the program and go ahead with the hackathon.

We run the program.

I take a slight sigh of relief—the decision is over—before taking the stage with my teammates in our lion and tiger onesies. I dance around and play the part of the hackathon organizer with customary good cheer. Looking out into a sea of excited and anxious teens, we read the names of the winners.

“Team Static Power 147!” we proudly call out. We hear an excited cry from one corner of the room. I don’t recognize the team—not abnormal in itself. Considering we have been running the hackathon, not judging it, I’ve only had the opportunity to see a handful of teams over the course of the event. That being said, I’m still pretty sure I had managed to visit the best booths. And this isn’t a team name I recognize.

I look at Mickey. He shrugs his shoulders. We read the next name.

“The Cybernated Detection Robot!” I look up to see a team I actually *had* visited. But I hadn’t been very impressed. And if I wasn’t impressed, I didn’t believe the amazing judges we invited could have been that impressed with them, either. I look toward my team members. Their eyes show the same concern. It’s becoming painfully obvious that I’ve made a mistake in trusting our program.

Still, I keep reading the names. Every name brings a new cheer, until I’ve read out all ten. As the teams find out they are not among the winners, they start to clear out. Slowly, the room empties out until only the final teams remain. The teams give their pitches, the judges score them, and we announce the winner. All the while, every one of us is thinking:

These are not the incredible teams that we saw at the hackathon.

The talent was there, sure, but the groups presenting did not possess the level of innovation some of the other teams had carried. We all left the hackathon feeling hollow.

After the hackathon ended, we decided that we would all go as a team to one of our members’ homes for a debrief. It was to be a celebration of what we had done but also a discussion on what was still left for us to do. When we arrived and sat down, my mind was spiraling. I was deeply bothered by the suspicion that the teams we had declared winners were not the teams the judges had actually selected. I *had* to figure out if our program was flawed. Unfortunately, to do this, I would have to manually compare the tally of all 500 voter sheets to the program’s results—a process that felt unreasonably

time-consuming, especially given my impatience to know the truth as soon as possible.

Instead, I decided to take one of the teams that I and others had been very impressed with—a team that had not won—and calculate their final score manually. The team was a group of army officers who had used sensors to show how Israel could build “smart streets” that communicated with vehicles. They had proposed how to do it in both a low-cost and scalable way. The basic concept was an IOT device that would get attached to a car and then communicate with street lights, stores, sidewalks, and other cars. By having the device on the car, they were able to establish a centralized system that could share information and communicate with different devices. First, I checked the score of the team that actually won the hackathon: 80 points. That felt pretty high. Then I tallied up the score of this team: 130 points.

My heart stopped. This was bad. I called Waverly over, as both my confidant and close friend. I showed her what I had found, and we both agreed we had to bring it up to the group.

When I announced that our software did not in fact work and that we had announced the wrong winners, I posed the question, “What should we do?”

There was silence. Everyone turned to one another.

“What can we do?” someone asked. Everyone started piling on.

“What’s the point of announcing there was a mistake *now*? The hackathon is over, the moment has passed, and this would be such a disappointment to everyone. Think of the teams who didn’t get to pitch in the second round. We can’t give them that chance back. All we’d do is cause confusion and embarrass ourselves...”

Before others in the room could voice their ethical objections, another team member spoke out in agreement.

“Why get into this mess? The hackathon was such a smashing success. Everyone said it was perfect. Why spoil it? No one will ever know.”

Some team members and I looked at each other, clearly in agreement that letting it go was not an option.

I tried to explain our point of view.

“It wouldn’t be the right thing for us to keep this to ourselves. Everyone should know who the actual winners are. The mistake was no one else’s fault but our own, and we have a responsibility to own up to it.”

I knew a majority of my team members agreed with me; however, some other team members were still not convinced and raised concerns regarding the complexity, the work, the embarrassment, and the reputation. While I continued advocating for owning the mistake, I began feeling a rush of feelings of guilt. What if I did harm the reputations of my team members by admitting this mistake publicly? Wasn’t their success my concern, too, especially as they all worked so hard in volunteering so many months to make it happen?

In times like this, when values, ethics, and success all seem to be pinned against each other, I always turn to my greatest mentor: my father. I called him and explained what we had done. Without needing to tell him my own views on the situation, he confirmed what I had been thinking. I put him on speaker phone at the table, and he, too, tried to convince the group that sending out an apology and correction was not simply the right way to proceed, but the only way.

As I said in the beginning of this story, one's true morals are only shown when they are tested. This is a testament to that. We were all doing this hackathon out of the goodness of our hearts. There was no profit to be made, no gains to be received. Often, there were even sacrifices. Mickey, who was in the army at the time, was reprimanded for falling asleep at the base in exhaustion after working so hard on the hackathon. But he would do it all again because we all knew how much this event meant to the students who were able, many for the first time, to explore the world through an engineer's eyes. Others were devoting their time and energy to make the events happen. We were all volunteers, all teens working to help out other teens.

But that's where the test comes in. We could all *say* we cared about fairness, and with more careful work, we could have written and tested a program that judged our teams' pitches correctly. But we didn't write that program, and our judging program hadn't worked. And when our integrity and ethics came into question, could we do the hard thing and follow our moral compass? Could we place fairness over our own reputations? Could we embarrass ourselves in front of Israel's leading technologists? We all grow up talking to our parents about ethics, and we all think we're people of morals. But when we actually face the hard decision head on, what choice will we make?

At the culmination of the lengthy debate, we were all in agreement. There was only one answer, even if it was a very agonizing one. That night, I sent out an email to a list of about 600 people. The subject line was: "We Were Wrong." The email detailed the mistake that had been made and promised any reparations possible. We

congratulated the top teams that were celebrated at the event, but we explained this was, embarrassingly, an error. While it would have been impossible to re-host the *Shark Tank* pitch round, we announced who the real top teams were based off of preliminary scores, making sure they received due recognition.

What followed were weeks of phone calls with disappointed students, parents, and other members of the hackathon community. I spent hours reaching out to the true winners and trying to work with them to find fair compensation. Even if it harmed my reputation, it was the right thing to do.

But the incredible thing about this decision, which I learned only in retrospect, was that it didn't even discredit the hackathon. Many judges told us that coming forward was the right thing to do and that they were proud of us. One said, "I am happy [that you emailed us], and I appreciate the way you handled this." Another mentioned, "This is a very brave thing to do, admitting a mistake. You are all doing the right thing. It takes courage." And aside from the judges' support, two of the largest news channels in Israel still covered the event, and countless kids were still changed by the opportunity to build and compete alongside Israel's brightest minds.

In the end, it didn't work out the way we wanted. Yes, we were terribly embarrassed, and yes, we feared a blow to our reputation. We also surely reduced the happiness score of our 500 attendees overall. But that doesn't mean the hackathon was a failure. In fact, to this day I continue to receive emails from participants talking about the event as a pivotal moment in their lives¹. I learned

¹ A good friend shared that because of the hackathon he discovered a deep passion in computer science and is currently doing machine learning research

that no matter the circumstances, you have to put others before yourself. Whether it's your reputation or your success at stake, it doesn't matter. When you take on the role of an entrepreneur, you accept responsibility for the well-being of your clients and employees alike, just as you would your own family. The companies, systems, and services you build are only as valuable as they are beneficial to those who take part in them. We should measure our victories by the number of lives we are able to improve through our endeavors. We should always strive to become not just people of success, but people of value.

at Google. Another participant was offered a job opportunity from one of our sponsors and relocated to East Asia. Recently the CEO of a fast growing startup sent me a picture of his newest hire, who was wearing the Hacking Generation Y t-shirt from the hackathon. Those are just a few examples of testimonials and stories I hear about the positive impact that the hackathon was making.

EMPATHY



“Most of all, do everything for the improvement of others. Inspire and lift up those less fortunate than yourself each day, and you will be happy!”

Elia Gourgouris, *Founder and President, The Happiness Center*

“Keep the pay-it-forward attitude, openness and curiosity and continue collecting experiences, growing and touching people along the way.”

Liat Aaronson, *Co-Founder, Horizen Labs; former Executive Director, IDC's Zell*

“Place critically high value on life: your life, your employees' lives, your clients' lives, their families' lives. Entrepreneurs are often celebrated and quoted for their success, even if they had such an obvious disregard for life, and we must change this. We are creators, motivators, beacons. Entrepreneurs represent hope, and our regard for life must align to such a calling. Our impact on humans is far greater than we realize and must be fully embraced and understood in all that we do. Be that entrepreneur children aspire to be because of your character and the value you place on life.”

Christa Dhimo, *Professor of the Practice, Biotechnology, Northeastern University; Founder of Impono*

“Don't keep your talents to yourself and for your own personal growth—share them and your values with humankind.”

Gidi Mark - *CEO, Birthright Israel*

“I believe that the foundation of culture is about values, and I think you really need to look in yourself and really understand what values you stand for and why.”

Zack Rinat - *President, DARE Foundation; Founder, ModelN*

I was six years old when I began to understand the value of an Israeli shekel—or, rather, the value of 20 shekels, which was what one pack of soccer cards at my local convenience store cost. All week, I would be on my best behavior, doing the dishes immediately when asked, walking our dog, and finishing my homework every night before dinner. Finally, when Sunday rolled around, I would ask my grandmother if she thought I had done enough chores to earn next week's cards. If she said yes, she and I would run immediately to the convenience store on the corner.

But I didn't realize at the time that I had only learned the value of money in the context of myself. I knew what the equivalent of five U.S. dollars could buy me, but I had no sense of what that amount of money might mean to someone else. One day, this changed.

My mother and I were running errands at our local shopping center. There were coffee shops and fountains of bright blue water around us. As a kid, I loved the shopping center, as it always felt like a massive expanse of plenty: kids, soccer cards, McDonald's, people. This particular day, however, I noticed someone out of the corner of my eye who stopped me in my tracks.

He had wrinkled skin and hands like old leather, his brow furrowed over his eyes like rows of soil ready to be sown with seeds. There was a certain soft wisdom about him, but also an appearance that suggested toil and hardship. Bent at the hips, one could almost hear

his body creaking. At age six, I would have only been able to describe him as a melancholy *gray*.

The old man was sifting through trash, and at first, I wasn't quite sure what he was looking for. He picked up a discarded McDonald's Happy Meal box and looked inside before tossing it back in the bin. He ran his fingers over newspapers and plastic cups, eventually finding a coffee shop pastry bag, which he examined closely. Empty of crumbs, he tossed that back in the bin, too. It became clear: *food*. He was looking for food.

I was shocked. At my young age, I felt deeply troubled by this, ashamed of my position of privilege in comparison to someone so much older than myself. I was not sure how to engage with what I was observing. The man looked old enough to be someone's grandfather. The thought of someone's grandparent having to rummage through garbage for food felt like a stab in my stomach.

"Mom," I looked up. "Can we do something?"

My mother quietly reached inside her purse and handed me a 100 shekel bill.

"Give it to him," she said, nodding in his direction. At that moment, a switch flipped inside of me. One hundred shekels? For me, that was five weeks of hard work. For me, that was worth five packs of the greatest things money could buy. And yet, my mother was willing, without a second thought, to give five times what she knew I was getting from my grandma a week, to a complete stranger.

Seeing that small act changed me. I began to realize that the value of money, along with all objects that can be bought and sold, is relative to the person possessing them. Food to a starving man means more than food to someone who just ate, even if the amount is the same.

I walked over to the man and handed him the money. Neither of us said a word, but there was an agonizing *thank you* that clung to the air. I understood what he was saying without him having to use a single breath to explain it.

My mom and I never discussed the event, and I'm not sure if the man or my mother could ever truly conceptualize how monumental that moment was for me. Though the money I gave the man wasn't actually my own, it still meant a great deal to me. It taught me that you can plan out your wages and your budgets—you can work hard to afford a pack of soccer cards—but when someone is more in need than yourself, you throw all of that out of the window and try and help them. As I grew older, I tried to implement this lesson as much as possible.

On my 13th birthday, my parents asked me what I wanted as a gift. Looking around my room, I concluded that I had all of the comforts I could ever want. I told them, "Nothing." When my birthday rolled around, my parents came to wake me up and sing to me "Happy Birthday."

"Michael," they said, "we know you didn't want anything for your birthday, so we didn't get *you* anything. We did, however, get something for someone else." My mother explained that for my birthday she had begun sponsoring a young girl in Egypt who would now, until the age of 18, be able to receive education, hot meals, and school supplies. I felt content. When you have your personal comforts taken care of, it's time to look outward. This becomes true not only when donating your money or time, but also when donating your empathy toward those around you. As I grew up, this concept was

reinforced by my mother's own mantra about *paying it forward*.

The concept of paying it forward rests on the idea that kindness breeds kindness. One selfless action or gesture will grow into something greater than itself, as it will inspire others to act selflessly in turn. My mother always believed in the value of paying it forward, a value that started, no matter what, with always assuming others acted with good intent. She believed that when someone cuts you off on the highway, instead of screaming and getting riled up, you should stop for a minute, and instead, consider: Were they on their way to the hospital for an emergency birth? Were they rushing to, God forbid, say goodbye to their father for the last time? If a supermarket clerk is rude to you for being too slow, consider that perhaps she had a very rough day, gets paid very little, and needs to make enough money to buy her children school books. My mother always looked at people who committed small rudenesses or wrongdoings, especially if she could see they were struggling, and thought: *There may be some excuse why they did what they did. Give them the benefit of the doubt.*

For me, I found this life changing. Especially as I got older, I realized how quickly everyone assumes malicious intent. I often thought, *Isn't assuming the bad just as easy as assuming the good?* What if we all just made the small change of paying empathy forward and giving people the benefit of the doubt? Wouldn't we all be so much happier? While this one change does not directly count as an act of kindness being paid forward, it's where the idea of paying it forward starts. It is also, at the very least, another example of a minimal life change we can

all commit to in order to increase our understanding toward one another.

I have carried this lesson with me my whole life. Whenever I'm in a leadership position, I've found it critical to not jump to conclusions about those who might have disappointed me. As an officer in the army, for example, if one of my soldiers failed to complete his mission on time, the conversation never began with a reprimand, but rather questions like these:

"How are you doing?" "Is everything at home OK?" "Did you get any sleep last night?" "When was the last time you ate?"

I always tried to begin any conversation with mutual respect and empathy for my soldiers. I would take my soldiers out to coffee and discuss with them what was going on. Surprisingly for me, more often than not, these conversations would end with them explaining that something was, in fact, causing distress in their lives at the time, giving context to their temporary failure in their mission. Many of these same soldiers later reported that these conversations were some of the most meaningful in building a relationship with me, their commander, and that our talks inspired them to try harder at their job. And I didn't have to take their word for it: I could see for myself that these soldiers had begun to work quickly and efficiently at a very high level. I learned that in order to build trust with those I was entrusted to lead, I had to give them the benefit of the doubt, assume there might be a reason for their failure, and offer them my understanding, rather than immediately resorting to reprimand or punishment as is so often customary in military environments.

I have taken this lesson also to my civilian life. I've found employers do not bond with their employees through strictly discussing projects or deadlines, but rather by occasionally taking the employee aside and saying, "Hey, before we start the project meeting, how about you tell me how you are personally doing and if you have any particular concerns."

That's what builds trust. And teamwork.

And who knows? Maybe then that employee goes to his subordinate, or a coworker, and asks *them* how their day was, and if they have any particular concerns. The ripple is sure to occur.

I experienced this firsthand also during my time in the Israeli Defense Forces. I was running a team of a few developers, and we onboarded a new guy who had a different background from the rest of us. Instead of being an expert in front-end web development, Yaniv had most of his experience in back-end development and software testing. When he was onboarded, however, a senior engineer, Vasili, took him under his wing as a mentee. Vasili had been in the unit for five years and was one of the top engineers we had, so it was truly a special experience for Yaniv to be mentored by him. Vasili spent hours with him every day, before and after the standard work day, training Yaniv and helping him through his struggles. Vasili helped him with his tasks and gave more feedback than was required of a senior engineer. Taking every opportunity to help him grow, Vasili truly embodied what it meant to be both a personal and professional mentor.

Flash forward a couple of months, and Yaniv had become an incredible software engineer. It was around this time that we decided to onboard three more people

to our team. When I asked the group who wanted to take on the task of mentoring them, Yaniv pulled me aside.

“Can I do it?”

At first, I was shocked, considering Yaniv had only recently finished his own onboarding mentorship. Of course, however, I said yes. For the next couple of months, Yaniv dedicated *his* time and effort to becoming a mentor for the new engineers on our team. He also went on to mentor others across multiple teams at the base.

One of the newbies he mentored is now a commanding leader in the IDF, mentoring his own group of team members—all thanks to Yaniv. When I went to ask Yaniv what made him continue his mentoring, he replied, “The mentorship I received from Vasili.”

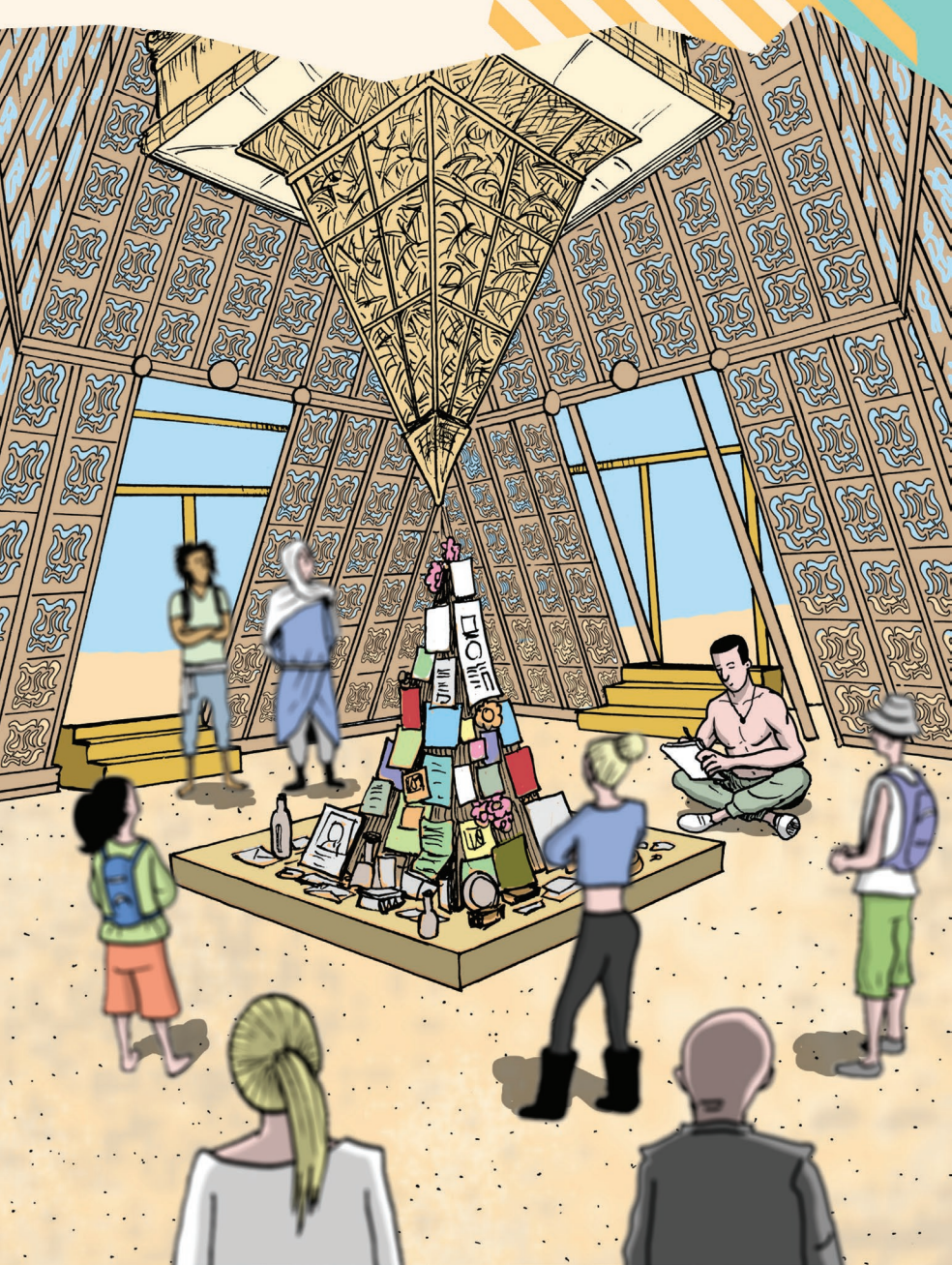
If this is not a perfect example of paying it forward—of having one good deed ripple forward into hundreds—then I don’t know what is.

At the base, nearly everyone is assigned to a big brother or sister when they get onboarded to a new team. The culture of mentorship and guidance has extended to reach every new entering member of the Elite Technological Unit, and this was all because people like Vasili decided to go the extra mile and mentor newcomers like Yaniv. The story even makes me reflect back on my own mentor, Amir, and how much he taught me. It is easy to say that his guidance is what inspired me to go and mentor many others after me.

So, if you are contemplating whether to do a random act of kindness, become a mentor, be a good friend, or help someone in need, do it. Pay it forward because you never know how many people your kindness might end up reaching.



BURNING MAN



“Although stupid-sounding advice, it is still valid: Dance. It will be useful in times when you succeed, and in times when you fail.”

Nadav Leshem, *CTO and Co-Founder, Jolt*

“Give yourself the permission to be human. Embrace any and all emotions, painful and pleasurable. Welcome them all”

Tal Ben Shahar, *Founder, Happiness Studies Academy; former lecturer at Harvard University*

“Learn how to unlearn. As an entrepreneur, you will deal with changing circumstances, ups and downs. Learning how to unlearn will enable you to let go, look at things the way they are, and take a step forward.”

Eran Sandhaus, *Managing Director, Copia Growth Partners*

“In every human being there is a hidden soul which is waiting to be recognized or comforted.”

Gadi Ezra, *Human rights lawyer, speaker, writer*

“Keep cultivating a space for yourself where you expand and deepen your consciousness, a space where you get to meet your deep inner self and where you can learn who you want to be in this life and what you’re committed to. Dare to dream big.”

Taly Dunevich, *Vice President Global Business Development & Alliances, Ayehu Software Technologies*

To be grounded is to have your feet in the dunes, your hands in the sand, and a pencil between your fingers. Pull your knees towards your chest, creating a desk for yourself in the middle of the desert, using your legs as a table. Start writing, and don't let your hand stop dancing across the page. Write about love, family, the home-cooked meal you're craving, the impossibly great sun above you—whatever comes to mind. Draw a picture of yourself and then erase it. Tear up the sheets into tiny pieces of dust and scatter them around you. To be grounded is to take the time to pause with yourself and reflect, to feel that everything above you is just sky.

To me, this is what Burning Man feels like: it's a place where I can disengage from everyday life and take time to reflect on who I am and who I want to be. It's a week in my year devoted to seeing myself and the world around me from a multitude of new perspectives, and no, not because I'm on LSD. In fact, I've stayed in legal territory throughout every Burning Man I've been to (three and counting); yet, to have the world as I know it a million miles away, and all my everyday comforts and social norms gone, feels extraordinary. Every time I attend the event, I find myself in that same position: sitting in the sand, using my legs as my desk, and writing in a notepad. Burning Man is a deeply personal experience. But before I talk about what I discovered there, let me take you back to the beginning.

My Burning Man journey began after high school. I had just graduated, and before starting my upcoming

years of service in the Israeli Defense Forces, I took a road trip across Europe with one of my best friends, Ben Penchas. At the end of our trip, he suggested that I join him and his family at a festival called Burning Man, which was tradition for them to attend every year. As I would with most things Ben suggested, I immediately agreed without a second thought. When I came home from Europe, I asked my dad if he wanted to join us, too. He agreed just as quickly: He's not one to turn a new experience down.

What we didn't know was that we had just signed ourselves up for one of the craziest adventures the world probably has to offer, both in terms of social connection and self-discovery. We began planning to the best of our ability, but neither my dad nor I really had any clue what to expect. Ben told us the basics:

"Burning Man is a week-long utopian society-festival set up in the middle of the desert in Nevada. The 70,000 participants build a temporary city from scratch with its own rules of behavior and many artistic expressions. Oh, and don't bring money. It doesn't exist as a concept there. Instead, start planning something else you can bring to gift the attendees. Everyone brings something."

I'm pretty sure my dad and I had more questions *after* talking to Ben, but regardless, we began preparing for the trip. For starters, I joked that for my gift to other attendees, I could bring a backpack full of Mitz-Petel—a beloved concentrated raspberry juice from Israel—and squirt it into fellow Burners' mouths throughout the week. On a more practical front, my dad and I began stalking Amazon lists of "Burning Man Essentials" and ordered a few items to the hotel we would stay in the night before we took off into the desert. Finally, the day

came to leave. We flew to Reno and boarded Ben's family RV along with his parents, siblings, and friends. My dad and I sported muscle tanks and Burning Man beards, feeling ready to experience something mind-blowing, even if we didn't exactly know what that mind-blowing thing would turn out to be.

Though it should have only been a three-hour trip, the drive took 11 hours in total because of the massive line of ticket holders waiting to get into Black Rock City—the utopian society that is Burning Man. As we approached the desert, we were told by Ben's parents and sister (who had been to the festival many times before) that once we went in, there was no turning back. There was no technology, no internet, just dust and tears and laughter. Bring it on.

When we arrived, a woman with bright purple hair came up to me and gave me a huge hug. The man with her said, "Welcome! We've been waiting for you, brother." He told Ben and me we'd have to do an "initiation" of sorts, so we rolled in the dust per our new friend's request. Then, we hopped on our bikes to join the other 70,000 Burners.

So, you ride around on your bike and something in your gut tells you to turn left. You keep going, past massive mutant vehicles shaped like hybrid vampire-dragons and cookie monsters, each with hundreds of people on top of them debating Big Bang theory, laughing hysterically, or sobbing together over shared hardship. You ride past someone giving free (like everything else at Burning Man) painting lessons. Out of the corner of your eye, you spot a man with long, yellowish hair. For some reason, your heart tells you to stop, so you do. You toss your bike on the ground and approach him.

You hug, and he begins telling you about his life as a transatlantic sole fisher. He talks about running from a polar bear in Alaska when his dad took him there at age 12. You remember a polar bear stuffed animal in your childhood room, and you start to cry, thinking about your grandfather, who has recently passed away. Out of nowhere, he pulls out a violin. He plays you a song. After a few hours, you get back on your bike and keep riding. You never even caught his name.

This is the essence of Burning Man: You are free from logic, conformity, and any sense of what you *should do*. Your heart is in complete control, and the hardest decision you will ever have to make will be whether you should jump off your bike and join a chorus of people singing Taylor Swift songs or keep riding to make it to the hundred-person game of Twister.

The week can only be described as constant motion, constant chaos, and constant exhilaration. Your only requirement of the week is to *exist*. Well, to exist and to give something back to the rest of the Burner community. As Ben had mentioned, this is called *gifting* and is one of the ten principles of Burning Man. The idea is that because the community does not acknowledge money, and nothing can be bought or sold, everyone must bring something to the Black Rock City. For some, this might mean setting up a make-your-own beignet stand, or for others, it might mean installing a 40-foot wooden sculpture on the campgrounds. You spend the entire week weaving in and out of random acts of kindness with strangers through art, dance, food, and drink. Yet the exchange of goods is not the only powerful exchange that happens during the event. Alongside your fellow Burners, you trade stories, wisdom, and songs.

One day as I was riding my bike, I saw an older man sitting and playing the guitar by himself. I stopped riding, as you do at Burning Man when something draws you in, and I asked what he was doing. He told me that he wrote songs for people.

“I listen to their stories and then write songs based on what I hear. I then record them on the spot and send them out via email after the event.” I was intrigued. I sat with him for hours, and I poured out my heart to him. When I was done, tears made clear pathways down my dusty face. He pulled out his guitar and, to my amazement, began singing.

What an incredible feeling to have someone listen to you—not because you’re in a job interview or because there’s anything to gain from the conversation, but out of the simple, plain desire to lend an ear. This man listened to me because he was genuinely interested, and with his bare hands, he created emotional artwork out of my lived experience. After his song, I got back on my bike and rode away. We never met again.

As you make your way through the week with no commitments, no schedules, and no meetings, there is only one guaranteed thing about your day: that you will meet countless incredible people. You stop to grab a taco from a roadside tent, and in line you will meet a veteran who starts talking to you about his PTSD. You bond together under the hot sun. Then you run around a massive spinning structure, pink and purple, like a top, but with a rope tied to it, that you fasten into and let hoist you up over the desert with an old truck pulley. You hop down and run through a makeshift house of mirrors. Leaving those adventures behind, you sit down in the Temple to reflect,

and you find a middle-aged woman sitting with you. You don't say anything to each other, just breathe in the silence and drink up your moments together.

Many of the most beautiful moments happen in the Temple, a non-religious house of thought and contemplation. Always beautifully built with magnificent architectural detail, the Temple stands at the heart of Burning Man. My favorite Temple at any of the Burning Man festivals I have attended was a pyramid made entirely out of intricate wooden carvings, like a million paper snowflakes piled high. Light peeked in through every crevice and star-shaped hole in the walls. It was like sitting under a water strainer while liquid gold poured in through the rooftops. While it stands, the Temple serves as a sanctuary for mourning, forgetting, remembering, forgiving, and sharing. In one corner, a mother prays; in another, someone weeps over a terrible loss. It is always the most beautiful, most arresting spot at the festival for me.

The Temple is also located near the site where, at the end of the week, a large statue of a man is set on fire—giving the festival its name. But the man statue is not unique in getting burned: In the end, most of the elements that make up the festival—including the thousands of pieces of artwork and beignet stands—go up in flames, leaving the natural desert as pure as it was before tens of thousands of people congregated in it, until the city and the temple are re-built anew the following year. Burners refer to this as *Leave No Trace*, a crucial part of the ten rules of conduct.

My first time at Burning Man, in 2014, I walked into the Temple to find a man playing guitar and singing “Hallelujah.” Before I knew it, dozens of people had

circled around him, myself included, all of us singing in unison. The man was sobbing, and he looked directly into the eyes of a woman sobbing with him. Both strangers to one another, I would later find out they were both crying because they had both lost their fathers that year. Neither of them knew the other's story, and yet, in the Temple, under the clouds of song, they connected with one another on the deepest level.

Every person comes to the Temple for a different reason, and whatever the reason, the Temple remains open. The only rule is that you have to participate: You cannot just be a bystander to the emotion. This pushes everyone to go outside of their comfort zones and try to explore feelings within themselves that they have never tapped into before. With a rush of emotions I didn't even know I harbored, I sat down in the Temple and just started writing. I wrote a five-page note to myself, letting go of the parts of my life and myself that weighed on me.

For the last three nights of Burning Man, everything gets burned. I knew our group was leaving Burning Man early and that we wouldn't get to watch the Temple set aflame, which occurs on the very last night of Burning Man, so I hid my letter in the leg of the man statue, which would be burned before we left.

The next night, we watched the wooden statue of the Man get ignited. Now, I'm not claiming I experienced a moment of complete and final liberation. I didn't just watch my letter burn up and suddenly feel released from my problems. I did, however, reflect on how I had just sat in the sand, not speaking to or knowing anybody, and took a moment to be with myself. Watching my letter burn up, I was reminded of how important—no, necessary—it is to take a minute to reflect. This kind of

reflection, of course, doesn't have to take place at Burning Man: Anyone can pitch a tent for a weekend with their friends and family and spend a moment in nature, free from the demands of everyday life. The important thing is to find a place that lends itself to tranquility.

For me, that place just happens to be this festival. I wait every year for that moment to go back and be with myself, alone in the desert.

At the end of the trip, I always leave exhausted—and not because I have been awake for most hours of the week or expended all of my energy at late night parties and cooking classes. I am exhausted because I have spent the week in a blanket of dust, wiping my eyes and purging my mind of all its swarming thoughts. I have spent time reflecting on who I am and who I want to be, and honestly, that's tiring work.

You lose track of time and allow yourself to completely immerse in other people's stories: For moments, you can almost become the person whose story you are listening to. You can see Foz do Iguaçu in the pouring rain; you can smell your grandmother's famous bread coming out of the oven, baked on the day you've just become the first member of your family to graduate college. Everyone's stories can be understood as if you are living them yourself. All these experiences get tossed into the air and scattered at random: Burning Man is for sharing.

One of the most moving experiences at Burning Man was meeting a young man named Xavier. The first time I saw him was at Ben's camp, where I was staying. Xavier was a good friend of Ben's family and someone they invited to stay with them every year. He had arms dressed in tattoos and glistening nose rings piercing his nostrils. I felt that Burning Man instinct to go speak with

him. It was the first day of my first Burning Man back in 2014, and he set the stage for the rest of my week.

We spent hours talking about our lives and our beliefs. He opened up to me about becoming an alcoholic at 14. He shared, bravely, that he had since been through rehab and gotten help from Ben's mother, Zoe, enabling him to leave the addictions behind. He explained how he used his own adversity to become a counselor for children in his Texas community who were experiencing similar hardships. Together, we held hands and shed tears through meditation sessions, slam poetry readings, and 2 a.m. runs across the main strip of Black Rock City.

I had the pleasure and honor of getting to know him better over three Burning Man experiences, and it is with the heaviest heart that I heard about his passing. When I first heard the shocking news, I felt as if I had been stabbed in the gut. It was so unexpected. I immediately called Zoe, and together we wept.

To me, his counseling to other youth exemplifies greatness in a person: to be able to put your own problems on the back burner so you can help others, even while you yourself are hurting. Xavier taught me so much. I feel grateful for our friendship, and I miss him. He truly understood what it meant to be a giver, and he was happy to share his secrets with the rest of the world. His compassion, respect, and keen ability to listen to any person with deep empathy made him not only a heroic counselor, but an inspiring friend.

I want to dedicate this story of reflection to him, because he has taught me what it means to live my life guided by self-reflection and empathy—to take pauses as I move along, and to check in with myself and others along the way. I am looking forward to visiting Burning

Man again, but it breaks my heart that I will not be able to embrace Xavier once I arrive. The experience will never be the same.

For me, the beauty of Burning Man is perfectly embodied in my friendship with Xavier. It's about having painful conversations with strangers, often very different from you in many respects, until those strangers become close friends. It's about having the same painful conversations internally until you understand and value yourself a little more fully.

For a week, you don't concern yourself with judgment, Facebook likes, or all the little things you've done wrong. Instead, you walk around in the desert with a group of people who are ready to break into song and dance, tell you their life stories, offer you something to drink, bead you a bracelet, and embrace you if you cry. It is a free flow of emotion, empathy, and respect in a community that thrives off a constant energy exchange between its members.

Out in the desert, your problems exist as philosophical concepts: something to muse on, but invisible to the naked eye. I took many lessons from these experiences. Lessons on empathy, listening closely to others, building meaningful connections, and listening to myself. Most importantly, however, I learned the value of taking time off from the rush of daily life, and particularly the rush of entrepreneurship. While the experience is exhausting, I ironically come out of it fully energized and ready to continue work.

Burning Man came to me as a surprise, something suggested by a friend. But another lesson I learned, as I carried some principles of Burning Man into my daily life over the last few years, is that I don't *need* the desert

or Burning Man to embrace this mindset. There's just as much opportunity for compassion at home, on campus, or in the workplace. I can—and do—reflect just as meaningfully in my own living room. Taking a day, or even an hour, to pause with myself and contemplate my existence, my path, and my intentions can feel incredibly impactful. It grounds me.

So, the next time you are feeling a bit overwhelmed, disappointed, or angry, sit back, take a deep breath, and try to allow yourself some quiet time before heading back into the thick of things ...

Sweep yourself through the dust that settles at the edge of the Earth, wildly. Sit at a table, or make one, and let your hand write what it wants. When you've finished your letter, sign your name on it. Better yet, paint flowers on it and hang it up for 70,000 people to see. And then burn it.

TEAMWORK



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“Always remember as a leader that the people—and not technology or patents—are what make a winning startup, so surround yourself with the best and fastest team you can find.”

Gigi Levy-Weiss, *Founding Partner, NFX*

“The best ideas come from the people around you. In order to get ideas, you should expose yourself to many different approaches; interact with various people from many domains. Allow yourself to learn different things in many different areas and explore different ways of thinking and doing.”

Ronit Levavi Morad, *Director, Program Management, Google*

“If I tell people, ‘Let’s build a community,’ they say, ‘I’m very, very busy.’ But, if you tell them to come in and that they will meet the best people, the best investors, and the best CEOs, then they say, ‘Where do I sign?’”

Oded Hermoni, *Managing Partner, J-Ventures*

“People get hired for their technical skills, but they get fired or they don’t get promoted for their lack of ability to work with people, manage projects, keep budgets, [and] make commitments.”

Lou Adler, *CEO, Performance Based Hiring*

“Consult, share, ask for advice, and talk with wiser people as much as possible, but while doing so, remember: There is a chance that you are the only one who actually knows the right answer because as an entrepreneur, you are expected to master your domain and know your users like no one else.”

Or Briga, *Co-Founder and CEO, NOVOS.GG*

There are probably hundreds of traits that contribute to making a successful team leader. Some that might come to mind are confidence, kindness, drive, and direction. I have always been interested in what makes a particular person a good leader. I have voraciously read “how-to” books on the subject, I’ve conducted many interviews with leaders, and I’ve been fortunate, during different programs at the Israel Defense Forces and MIT Launch, to receive high-quality leadership training. For this chapter, however, I am most interested in examining three qualities that relate to team building. The first is an interest in other perspectives, and the second is a desire to learn from and work with team members with a broad range of perspectives. The last one, only achievable once you’ve taken the time to learn from all members of your team, is an ability to create a cohesive, driven group that’s willing to give 150 percent of its energy to the mission. I can say that from my experience, regardless of the project I’ve led, these are the three qualities that have determined my failure or success in a given project or mission.

The first of the three leadership qualities, openness to other perspectives, is something I was able to practice while in high school. During my freshman year, I fell in love with Model United Nations. If you are unfamiliar with Model UN, it is an extracurricular activity that asks students—taking on the role of a country, NGO, or other organization—to participate in a mock United Nations committee at which they debate and negotiate with one

another. I originally was drawn in by the idea because I loved that it allowed me to explore opinions that weren't mine. It challenged me to understand new perspectives, and it forced me to think critically about how the group or nation I was representing would want me to present the arguments for their side.

What I didn't realize, however, is that the activity would pay dividends later, as it gave me a roadmap for breaking down and understanding perspectives of all kinds. When I was in 11th grade, I was tasked to represent Germany in a historical committee taking place immediately after World War I, in the context of the Treaty of Versailles. Growing up in an Israeli Jewish family that lost the majority of its relatives to the Holocaust, including all my beloved grandfather's extended family, representing Germany was an incredibly painful experience. The history of Germany and the Jewish people was incredibly sensitive to me, and it was a history I reflected on often. What I had never had the chance to do, however, was reflect on that history from a different perspective. What could have led Germany to commit such an atrocity? On an individual level, what leads an ordinary citizen to end up committing actions that would lead to some of the cruelest events in human history? So, despite many personal reservations, I took it upon myself to seek answers to these questions.

The choice was critical because I consider myself a lifelong learner with a serious responsibility to understand why the other side does what it does. I don't have to agree with them or support them, but I do feel the need to learn their side so I can be knowledgeable about where they are coming from. To prepare for this conference, I tasked myself with reading dozens of primary

sources (translated, of course) and becoming as familiar as I could be with the subject matter. It was crucial for me to first understand the objective history of what had happened and then dive deeper into the thought process that led to those events occurring. I was immensely aware of the bias with which I entered this research project; after all, my family has a deep history with the atrocities that took place in 20th century Europe. However, by first studying all the facts through the lense of historical research, I was able to look at more aspects and sides of the conflict, and then allow my emotions to guide myself into asking the more perplexing questions to me of “how” and “why.”

Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and the atrocities led by Germany that were committed on the Jews and so many others are inexplicable and inexcusable. But through learning historical facts, I gained valuable insights into the suffering of the German people after the Versailles Conference, and I could more clearly picture the grievances that led them into World War II. And also, in the case of the Holocaust, I can make sure I use what I learned about the thought process that went on in Germany at the time to try to ensure something like this never happens again. To anyone.

Over the years, I began to see learning facts and thought processes and listening to different perspectives, not only as a responsibility but as something I was passionate about doing. I ended up winning various awards during my time with Model UN, and it was not because I was necessarily the best speaker or negotiator; it was because I was extremely ardent about understanding every side of the debate and leading teams in a way that reflected this understanding.

But staying open to different sides of a debate is only half the battle. For this openness to positively impact my leadership, I learned I would also have to put effort into bridging different perspectives. This became most apparent to me while I was leading teams in the IDF. In Israel, we have mandatory military service, so every year, a new class of 18-year-olds from every part of Israel receives a summons to enlist. Because this shared experience is so unifying, when you go into a bar in Israel, the first question most people ask you isn't where you're from or what your job is, but instead, "What unit did you serve in?" Because it is a universal experience, the mandatory enlistment process is a true melting pot, bringing together people from all walks of life: from the wealthiest to those living in extreme poverty; the most educationally privileged to those who had to drop out of school and work to help their family survive; the most religious to the most secular. My story concerns the last two.

Several months into my military service, I was chosen to go to the Officers' Academy, a specialized leadership academy where top-performing soldiers from the different IDF units are sent for six months of training to become officers. Both my father and my uncle had attended, so I felt honored and excited to follow in their footsteps. When I arrived at the academy, I found myself amongst 1,000 of the IDF's up-and-coming leaders, thrown together in an isolated camp surrounded by miles of desert. I was immediately placed in a team of ten and told that, for the next six months, I would work alongside them to complete challenges, build projects, and form lasting bonds. This team was to become my new family.

Now, getting assigned a team felt somewhat new to me. When I was younger, like most kids, be it for school projects or sports, I always chose my teams. This, for the most part, meant I mostly worked with my friends. But the Officers' Academy was different. Here there was no choice. You had to work with the group you were assigned to.

I was also coming to realize I was different from the other cadets. Predominantly influenced by American culture in my upbringing (after having attended an American school in Israel and living in Palo Alto for several years), my experiences and behavioral norms were many times at odds with those of the diverse group of cadets around me. Yet every day—no, every minute—we were tested on our ability to solve problems together. We had to find ways to communicate, bridge social differences, and respect where each other was coming from. I knew this was going to be one of the greatest experiments in leadership and teamwork I had ever been a part of.

One man on my team, Ori, would end up teaching me more than anyone about what it means to value others' perspectives as a team leader. Ori came from a religious neighborhood in Jerusalem and grew up studying the Old Testament. I, in contrast, came from a relatively secular neighborhood in Tel Aviv and grew up studying STEM. He wore a yarmulke, and I kept my head bare. We shared few cultural references, and fewer jokes, in common.

Still, between the long research projects we worked on together, the rigorous physical training we completed alongside each other, and the meals of canned food we shared, we realized we'd have to better understand each

other if we wanted to survive. And to better understand each other, we had to better understand each other's values and ideals. I started sitting with him in the base's synagogue on Saturdays, where neither of us would use our phones (to keep Shabbat), and he started spending afternoon lunches with me, where I showed him the various new app-based technologies I was working on. He opened up to me about religion and the passages in the Bible that perplexed him the most, and I shared with him my passion for technology and innovation. We would spend three or four hours sitting together and discussing our lives and our values, learning how each of us approached the world in our dramatically different ways.

These conversations were some of the most impactful I've ever had, and as time went on, we came to realize we were not all that different from each other after all. While our actions might have differed, our intentions were often quite similar. We both agreed that familial relationships were of the utmost importance, and that empathy was the hallmark quality of a great person. Over the six months at the Officers' Academy, this was possibly the most meaningful experience I had: learning how to keep an accepting, open mindset with every person I work with and making strong friendships along the way.

Because of our newfound understanding of one another, we were better able to solve the problems our team was tasked with. Whether it was navigating the desert wilderness for days together with only a compass, a map, some water, and dry food or spending sleepless nights in the base on complex group missions relating to Middle East security, we never would have

been successful had we not taken the time to learn about one another outside of our roles on the team. After all, the way we all approach problems is a direct product of our upbringing and experiences. Having grown up studying theology and ethics, Ori brought invaluable moral insight to our team. Having spent most of my life improving my technical side, I brought a different skill set to the table. But, again, we never would have discovered our varying assets had we not taken the time to truly understand one another. I learned that without understanding someone as a *person*, I would probably never be able to understand them as a problem solver, either. And only when I understood both could the team reach its greatest potential.

A couple of years earlier, I had the privilege of observing students at my high school do exactly this: successfully cooperate with others holding different viewpoints from their own. In my senior year of high school, I was chosen to be the secretary-general of our school's Model UN conference. This event, called TIMEMUN, is one of the largest Model UN conferences in the Middle East, bringing more than 700 students together. Being the secretary-general not only gave me incredible leadership experience, but it also gave me the chance to watch young delegates bridge their divergent perspectives.

For this TIMEMUN conference, we created a new committee called the Special Committee. This group would be tasked with discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When Aviva Rosensweig, one of our great advisors¹,

¹ WBAIS was a second home to me, and many of the teachers and faculty remain lifelong mentors. I have grown immeasurably as a result of Nicole Chernick's unwavering honesty and support; Joe Lyss's thoughtful teaching and guidance; Nili Sadovnik's energy and enthusiasm; Edie Weitzman's steadfastness and personal coaching; and Neal Jacover's constant encouragement.

brought the idea to the conference the year before, I was skeptical of even considering it. Talking about the conflict within my community had become nearly impossible, so hosting a discussion among Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, Palestinians, and international students serving as delegates seemed 10,000 times harder and a recipe for disaster. "It will be tough," Aviva warned, "but we will make it work."

So, in my year as secretary-general, I found myself overseeing a committee (with two wonderful chairs running its daily schedule) of 70 delegates on the Middle East conflict, each coming with their own strongly felt emotions and personal viewpoints, who were required to put aside their perspectives and enter the debate representing a different one.

In Israel, every Israeli is usually only separated from any other by one degree. This means that every Jewish Israeli delegate was sure to be directly affected by the conflict himself or through someone he knew in some way, be it emotionally or physically. Palestinian delegates were in a similar situation. This was an incredibly emotional conflict to be debating for them, as each also had a direct connection to the conflict or to someone who was affected by it. And for Arab Israelis, their identity no doubt gave rise to pain from the conflict, as well as other ramifications, personal and otherwise.

So, to make this work, we had to prepare extensively. The committee chairs went through dedicated training and the delegates were required to attend a preparatory session led by invited professionals coming from different sides of the conflict (Israelis and Palestinians).

The night before the committee convened, I was sleepless. This was a conference I was responsible for. So

much could go wrong. So many emotions could burst in the Special Committee. And after all, we were just teenagers. But, as I checked in on the committee room the first morning it convened, and throughout the weekend, I was shocked. Never had I seen such a display of empathy and respect in my life. The delegates were leading calm, rational discussions, many of them arguing for viewpoints that could not be more different from their own. They calmly went to the podium, gave their pitches with determination, listened to others, discussed the most contentious issues, and rebutted energetically, but politely. Respect and dignity ruled the room, even if emotions were high. What most amazed me, however, was that this respect and dignity did not stop in the committee room.

Later in the weekend, during our social dances and dinners, I would notice the delegates continuing the conversation outside of the formal debate. They always gave the same level of respect they had in committee, even if they were now defending different viewpoints: their very own. Many shared personal stories, some very difficult to hear. Always, however, these high schoolers disagreed with each other respectfully, something many politicians today fail to do. Together, they started a dialogue that I am hopeful will continue as they each become the future leaders of the Israeli and Palestinian people. I do truly believe that through utilizing leadership skills like *understanding* and *empathy*, these young leaders will make significant progress toward solving the conflict.

But the lessons on team leadership were most valuable when put to use on an actual team, together with a third lesson I learned. That was a lesson on creating

a cohesive, driven group that's willing to give 150 percent of themselves to the mission. How do you do this? Passion. Not just by feeling passionate yourself, though that is incredibly important, but by leading a team of people you can inspire to be passionate about whatever it is they are doing.

This is a lesson I learned most impactfully during my time in the military. Within my unit in the IDF, I created and led a new team of eight, which—with the blessing of my commander, Roei—I was allowed to operate much like a startup. Generally, teams in my unit were tasked with building long-term critical security infrastructure-related technology or conducting deep computer science research. I have led groups like this but wanted to do something different. I wanted to create and lead a group that could take on more short-term—and more varied—projects. When I was given my team, I was ecstatic. I knew that every member was incredibly passionate and excited about the work, and we were going to be successful. After all, our ability to solve challenges would come down to our willingness to solve them—and we certainly all were willing to do whatever it took to make strides for our team.

However, when I first accepted the leadership role, I led my team imperfectly. I was a micromanager. Within two months, two team members quit. I felt discouraged, and I realized I needed to make a change to my leadership style. Word of the work of my team had spread, demand was increasing, and I had become so caught up in trying to be the most successful commander possible that I often agreed to take on more than 20 new missions per day for my team, not stopping to consider how the workload was affecting my team members. What I

came to understand, however, was that I not only had a responsibility to accept and finish as many tasks as possible, but also to make sure my team's emotional needs were taken care of. I needed to ensure each team member felt appreciated and passionate about their work, not dreading the laundry list of tasks I assigned each of them every morning.

So, as I entered my third and fourth months of leadership, I began to slow down our workflow and more carefully prioritize the incoming tasks. I wanted to give my team members the freedom to fly without my watch, take a breath, and excel.

I also realized that if I wanted my team to go the extra mile—to give 150 percent rather than 100 percent—it was all about letting people work on the projects they were passionate about. One woman on our team was excited by data science—even if she knew relatively little about it at the time. So, instead of insisting she continue to do something else she was already good at, I decided to risk slowing down our very fast-paced workflow for her to teach herself machine learning and statistics. In just a few months, she did magnificent work for our team, integrated her machine learning capabilities into her work, and eventually, when finishing the IDE, was such an expert in her area of passion she was hired at Google. I had learned, albeit the somewhat hard way, that the incredible thing about leadership is you don't have to micromanage people who are already passionate about what they are doing. You never need to force them to work because, to them, it won't feel like work. If I can match a certain task to the person passionate about it, it is almost a winning ticket. It is not always possible, but certainly, it's an ideal to strive for.

This principle held up with the rest of our team as well. There was a man on the team who wanted to be a team leader, and I knew he was very likely next in line to replace me when I'd eventually leave. So, I let him take one of our products and run a program independently of me. He structured a subunit within our unit and led meetings and talks with customers around the base. Again, I never had to harass him about getting things done or being more diligent—because he was doing what he loved.

Through my experience, I slowly shifted my mindset: Rather than delegating tasks to people based on what needed to be done and micromanaging, I learned to begin by looking at the people around me and matching them with tasks that most suited them, even if they were occupied at the moment. It turned out they would finish both tasks much more quickly than if tasked with a single job they were not passionate about.

If there was a person who was passionate about an issue and who had the appropriate skills for it, but there was no matching task, I went as far as creating new tasks that would fit that passion. For example, a man on our team told me he was incredibly passionate about product management. As a team of engineers, our primary job was to produce code and technology, so at first, we were all a little confused. But we let him allocate a significant portion of his time to be “product manager” for the products we were producing in our unit—something not customary in our work—and communicate with people in the IDF about our technological products. He ended up talking to about 30 different groups around the base, helping to increase our productivity because now we could better understand what our consumers needed

from us. Fast forward a few years, and he recently joined the company I am currently working for, Hippo, as a software engineer with a focus on product management tasks. On his first day, he told me that the product management experience he got at the IDF was fundamental to him and his growth. It was the first time he had been able to explore his interests without having to stifle his creativity.

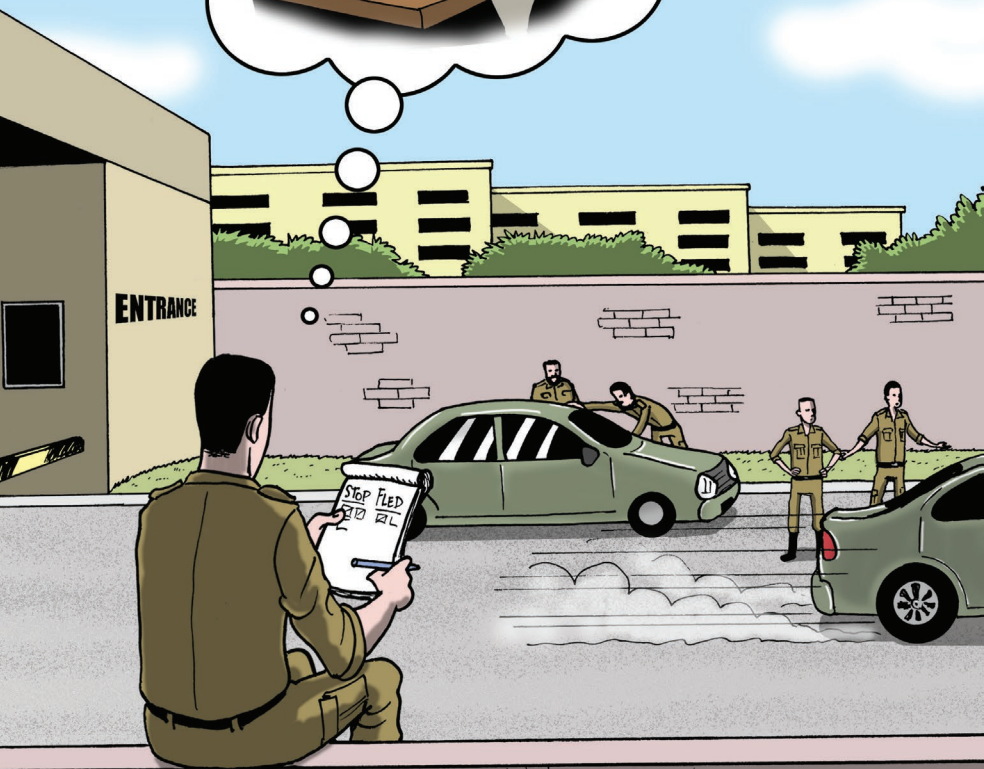
I learned that if the team members know their team leader tries to take their preferences into account, and listens to their opinions, then even when tasked with missions that are not necessarily their preference (which may happen quite often), they will work on them as eagerly and with as much commitment as on missions that are within their personal preferences.

Another important lesson I have learned is that failure, on different levels, is part of the game. What matters is that you take a step back and contemplate where your leadership took a tumble. Why was a group effort unsuccessful? What could you have done or offered more of? Where could you have taken a step back? To make a strong team, you need a strong leader, no doubt, but that leader needs to help the group be passionate about the team's common goal. And that means trying, as much as possible, to be sensitive to each group member's different perspectives and abilities².

2 My experience in the IDF was no less than incredible and inspiring. Aside from those mentioned already, I also have my colleagues and mentors to thank, who pushed me to become both the best engineer and best commander I can be. My own team leaders, Vlad and Daniel, welcomed me with open arms and made my improvement their mission. My platoon commanders, Hila and Roei, were impeccable role models of honorable service. Yaniv taught me the importance of remaining sharp and technical regardless of rank or position. Yoav showed me the beauty in leading with humility and respect. Koby always believed in me, providing me with unparalleled opportunities and motivation.

So, in closing, I have learned that it is important to keep your eyes open to the different perspectives around you and to always be willing to listen and work with those holding the different perspectives rather than immediately trying to change their minds. I have learned it is important to look at each team member individually to learn their strengths, weaknesses, and passions. Then, once you better understand your teammates as people, you will be able to fire them up and inspire them to work hard on whatever project is on the table for that day. I have learned to always first listen and empathize, then the results will follow. Remember: A leader isn't a leader without a team, and a team is nothing without passion.

BREAKING THE MOLD



“Sometimes a researcher needs to focus their energy on one item out of a list of great ideas. I’d say, ‘I’m not asking you to let go of those other aspirations.’ Keep them and love them. Let’s just get going with this one first, and then we’re going to get going on the others later.”

David Tennenhouse, *Chief Research Officer, VMWare*

“I cannot work for anybody. I’m the worst employee there is. So, the only other option for me was to build my own environment.”

Assaf Wand, *Co-Founder and CEO, Hippo Insurance*

“Anything that can be done can be done better. The world is now, and will always be, full of problems. Find a problem you care about that you have a special ability, or insight, to fix. Recruit a team of people who share your vision and determination to solve the problem, regardless of obstacles.”

Jeff Epstein, *Operating Partner, Bessemer Venture Partners*

“My advice is to stop and breathe, do as much market research as you possibly can, and build a landscape of other companies in your space, companies targeting the same audience as you. Who has succeeded? Who has failed? Why, and how will you differentiate yourself from everyone else?”

Hillel Fuld, *Startup Advisor and Tech Columnist*

“Break free of existing paradigms. Don’t be bound by incrementalism. Think imaginatively, research exhaustively, consult widely, focus intensively. And then, be bold—not reckless, but not intimidated by the audacity of what you are attempting.”

Larry Diamond, *Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University*

It was a typical night: hundreds of soldiers packed in at the entrance of the base, waiting for rides home. I was in that pack, just starting my service at the base as a young soldier. I was talking with my commander when a car rolled to a stop. “Netanya!” the officer behind the wheel shouted. A disappointment. The few soldiers headed to Netanya moved toward the car, now parked behind the guardrail at the front of the base.

I started talking with my fellow soldier again until the next car came by a few minutes later. “Tel Aviv Train Station!” the driver shouted. But before he’d finished speaking, we knew what was in store. All the soldiers glanced around as if to say, “Good luck,” and then it happened: We started running like mad, 30 of us in an open race to the small space between the metal guardrail and the road, where the first lucky four would get in the car. The other 26 would try their luck with the next car (the unluckiest often waiting upwards of 40 minutes).

Serving as an 18-year-old in one of Israel’s elite technological bases was exhilarating: brilliant minds all around me, working together on some of the most cutting-edge cybersecurity technologies the country had seen. In many ways, it was an ideal workplace: My fellow soldiers and I shared enthusiasm, commitment, and a common goal. While we often faced 14-hour workdays, racing to meet tight project deadlines came with a rush of adrenaline, as well as a deep sense of purpose in life. So much could be said for our working environment.

For our quality of life, I'd better reserve my praise. With all the urgent missions we had to attend to, little attention had been given over the years to the smaller patterns of daily life. Who had time to devote, for instance, to wondering how thousands of soldiers could quickly get home after a 14-hour shift? Solutions to even the simplest problems became more complicated in military life, for a range of reasons including time constraints and questions of information security. These were issues no one wanted to think about: After all, we had just come from a 14-hour shift.

Still, we all dreaded the commute home from the military base: all of us crammed together, impatient, waiting for an officer heading in the right direction to give us a ride. Rain or shine, we all waited, since none of us soldiers had cars. We all quickly grew accustomed to standing for upwards of 40 minutes each night, racing each other for the coveted spots in cars, each free-for-all tinging our camaraderie with an uncomfortable—if friendly—competition.

Finally, I had had enough. When I was sent to a specialized four-month coding bootcamp as a part of my ongoing military training, I decided I would use the opportunity to start devising a solution to this problem, even though it had nothing to do with my regular missions. It wasn't until I returned to the base, however, that I really got my hands dirty.

I reached out to a fellow soldier, Eden, and we decided to dedicate a weekend to developing our idea. We envisioned a ridesharing app that could match riders and drivers who were traveling from the base in similar directions. Excited about the massive impact this could have on our officers and peers, not to mention our own

sleep schedules, we were willing to work tirelessly to complete it.

That weekend, Eden and I brought our sleeping bags to base for a two-man hackathon. With a 12-pack of Red Bull in a cooler, we locked ourselves in my office until we developed an app to address the problem. In 48 hours, we had a prototype of our new app, TakeAway, and in 72 hours, we managed to release the app internally to the entire base. The idea was simple: Riders and drivers would register their destinations in advance, and the app would match riders with their optimal rides. The matching would take place inside the base—alleviating information security anxieties—and drivers could notify riders when they were preparing to leave.

Now, we knew there was a problem with ridesharing inefficiency, but until we released TakeAway, we had no idea just how great the problem was. In our three-week trial period, we registered 1,500 rides. Across the same time frame, we saved about 1,000 hours of manpower because of the time we were able to cut from the soldiers' waiting. While it was a pretty incredible feeling to have shown that a gross inefficiency could be solved in a weekend, I wasn't able to see TakeAway through to its end: I was chosen to attend the Officers' Academy, so Eden and I regretfully had to shelve the work.

That was all about to change, however. Flash forward a few months and I was graduating as valedictorian from the Officers' Academy. It is an IDF tradition that if you graduate first in your cohort, you get to have coffee with a senior commander in your unit when you return to your base. For me, this meant I'd look forward to meeting the Elite Technological Unit's chief of staff, Colonel Ronit Levavi Morad. This was an incredible honor, not

only because of her rank and expertise in our field, but also because most officers only have the opportunity (if they're lucky) to interact with the chief of staff maybe once or twice during their five- to ten-year tenure. Needless to say, I was elated.

When I walked into the meeting room, I saw the colonel sitting down, two coffees waiting in front of her, with the biggest smile I had ever seen. She motioned for me to take a seat, asked me to call her Ronit, and excitedly began asking me about my life and my work. During our chat, I happened to mention TakeAway.

She immediately jumped in, "Oh, you're the one who started that! I've been meaning to talk to you!" She explained she wanted to use her position of seniority to inspire out-of-the-box innovation, not necessarily related to workflow, that could better the lives of the soldiers on the base. She said the project we had been privately working on was exactly the kind of thing she had been hoping soldiers would start creating in their spare time. After asking if I would agree to continue our TakeAway efforts (to which I replied, "Of course"), she shook my hand and promised we would meet again soon. I was blown away.

I also knew I had serious work to do. The initial operations of TakeAway were good, but our ride-matching algorithm was still far from optimal. The obvious next step in improving TakeAway was to conduct actual *market research*, finding weaknesses and strengths in the app's operations in order to better understand how it could improve. Like any other night, we went outside after work to the line of soldiers waiting for a ride. This time, however, rather than joining them, we observed them. I sat with a notepad on a small ledge outside the

base, excited to watch the race from an investigator's perspective.

I set up a chart on my notepad, tracking every car that arrived, as well as the number of people who attempted to board versus how many actually boarded. When the first car stopped, I started tallying. Slowly, I began noticing something interesting. Half of the time, the problem was not that the soldiers couldn't get into the car, but that the car wasn't stopping at all. Countless drivers with empty back seats would simply speed past the group of huddled soldiers without a second thought.

To fix this, I went back to Ronit. We discussed the problem and agreed that not stopping to pick up a fellow soldier went against basic principles of our base. In wondering how we could increase participation, we landed on the idea of a penalty system. The idea was that if we penalized drivers who didn't register a pickup with the app, then there would be a greater incentive for drivers to use the app faithfully. The next day, penalties were already being administered to those drivers who didn't comply. The punishment was a revocation of the officers' in-base parking passes, forcing them to park off of the base a couple of blocks away. This meant a longer walk to work every morning, which we expected would be a sure deterrent for impatient drivers.

What we noticed, however, was that the penalties were not very useful. Many officers simply refused to register their cars on the app, favoring a quick ride home in silence to a possible detour, even at the expense of a penalty. So, in search of a better solution, I turned to another one of my mentors: behavioral economist and best-selling author Dan Ariely. When I explained the problem to him, he suggested that instead of penalizing the drivers,

we should implement a reward system. That way, our officers could perform social good while enjoying themselves—rather than grudgingly performing social good because they *had to*. So, hoping to lift the spirits of drivers worried about soldiers scratching their cars or getting their muddy boots in their back seat, we set out to “gamify” the app.

Our next version of TakeAway imagined a friendly ridesharing competition of a different sort. By adding different tiers of driver ranks depending on how many soldiers an officer had driven (General Driver, King Driver, etc.) and providing reward emojis and badges for various milestones, we hypothesized that we could increase user traffic (no pun intended).

Unfortunately, this next version of TakeAway would have to wait—again. While we were eager to observe the effects of our changes in action, our day jobs demanded more and more of our time, and we could not continue to invest significant time on the app. The improvements we needed to make had become too complex to shoe-horn into our already very limited spare time. Still, we felt we had started something important. Even in an institution as rigid as the military, we had found an opportunity to break the mold. This would become a guiding principle in my life. And I knew this wasn’t the end of the TakeAway story.

As is so often the case in entrepreneurship, it was yet another innovation that would end up bringing TakeAway back to life. It was a Tuesday afternoon, months later, and I was hoping to enjoy lunch with my friend. Lunchtime, however, was often far from relaxing. In our extremely busy workday, we usually had very little time to stop and eat. Among the few dining halls

or small restaurants on the base, the most popular—a chicken tenders and hummus spot—always seemed to have a 40-minute line. I was braving this line with my friend when we began to get frustrated. *There has to be a better way to do this*, we thought.

I went up to the restaurant manager at the end of the day and asked why the wait was always so long. He told me that everyone wanted to eat at the same time, so his restaurant became insanely busy from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., but it remained almost empty at every other hour. I went back to my friend and told him this. There was a solution in there somewhere.

Sure, I might be *hungry* between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., but I certainly could *decide* what I would want to eat well before then. Why was the restaurant not taking pre-orders? I went back to the manager and asked him how he usually received orders throughout the day. He pointed to the counter where his workers took down orders from a group of shouting soldiers and smiled. I asked if there was any other mechanism for ordering, and he opened up his phone to show me his WhatsApp.

The app was filled with orders from upwards of 30 soldiers who privately messaged him each morning to tell him what they wanted to eat. Those soldiers would have their lunches waiting for them when they arrived, and they could skip the line. This time, I was the one smiling: The manager had inadvertently come up with a solution to his own problem by giving away his private phone number. He just hadn't done it for everyone. And of course, he couldn't take this approach to everyone.

I quickly partnered up with three friends: Dan, Tomer, and Gilad. Together we developed an application, within the constraints of the military security and other

requirements, on which all soldiers on the base could order the meal they wanted ahead of time, and their orders would be automatically registered at the base restaurant. Then, soldiers could pick up their pre-ordered meals at their convenience, circumventing the 40-minute afternoon line.

This new system not only greatly reduced wait time at the restaurant, but because it attracted more customers, the base restaurant had more business. They ended up buying an additional fridge to store pre-prepared food, making their turnaround for orders even faster. The base restaurant also purchased a monitor to display what orders would be ready at what time. Slowly, memories of the long lines were forgotten.

News of our launch quickly traveled around the base, and before we knew it, word got around to the highest ranks. They wanted every restaurant on base, including the main cafeteria, to use the pre-order system we created. For many people, it was a revolutionary idea for a military base, but for us, we just saw it as an engineering challenge like any other. I believe that when a true entrepreneur notices something is off, it's like an unscratchable itch: It preoccupies them completely, and they have to give their all to finding a solution.

Even when I had been working to develop TakeAway, I had this mentality. When I was home during a break, I called two of my best friends, Mickey and Daniel, and asked them to help me work on the user interface for the app. The two of them, entrepreneurs themselves, picked up the phone and without hesitation came to my house at 3 a.m., both of them understanding that I would not be able to rest until I had figured out my solution. It was this same *need* to create and provide solutions to

problems that drove my fellow soldiers' and my security-related advances at the base. It didn't matter whether the solutions lasted forever. Some would fizzle out, but that's OK. The important thing is that someone took the time and energy to *create* them.

Throughout these various technological innovations, Ronit remained a close mentor. She brought a radiant and powerful energy to every conversation, and through long evening meetings and phone calls, we quickly became "partners in crime." We often discussed how in a very bureaucratic system with many moving pieces, it's easy to assume that things are the way they are for a reason and not just because no one has tried to fix them yet. We knew there were countless capable soldiers on the base, all of whom could create incredible innovations if given the chance. So, to help facilitate this, we decided to host an Elite Technological Unit soldier hackathon.

Now, I can't say the innovations created at the hackathon, or even the TakeAway or restaurant app I created, *in themselves* revolutionized life at the base. What I can say, however, is that these extracurricular projects fundamentally transformed the way thousands of soldiers interacted with the base, how comfortable they felt there, and how readily they took on daily inconveniences and frustrations as personal challenges. Soldiers no longer felt resigned to their conditions, but instead they felt enthusiastic about shaping them, and this had a direct impact on our work. Understanding this, it is not difficult to see why Ronit, being the remarkably perceptive chief of staff that she was, placed such an emphasis on daily-life innovations.

The culmination of all of this came when Ronit made a team within our unit solely dedicated to creating digital,

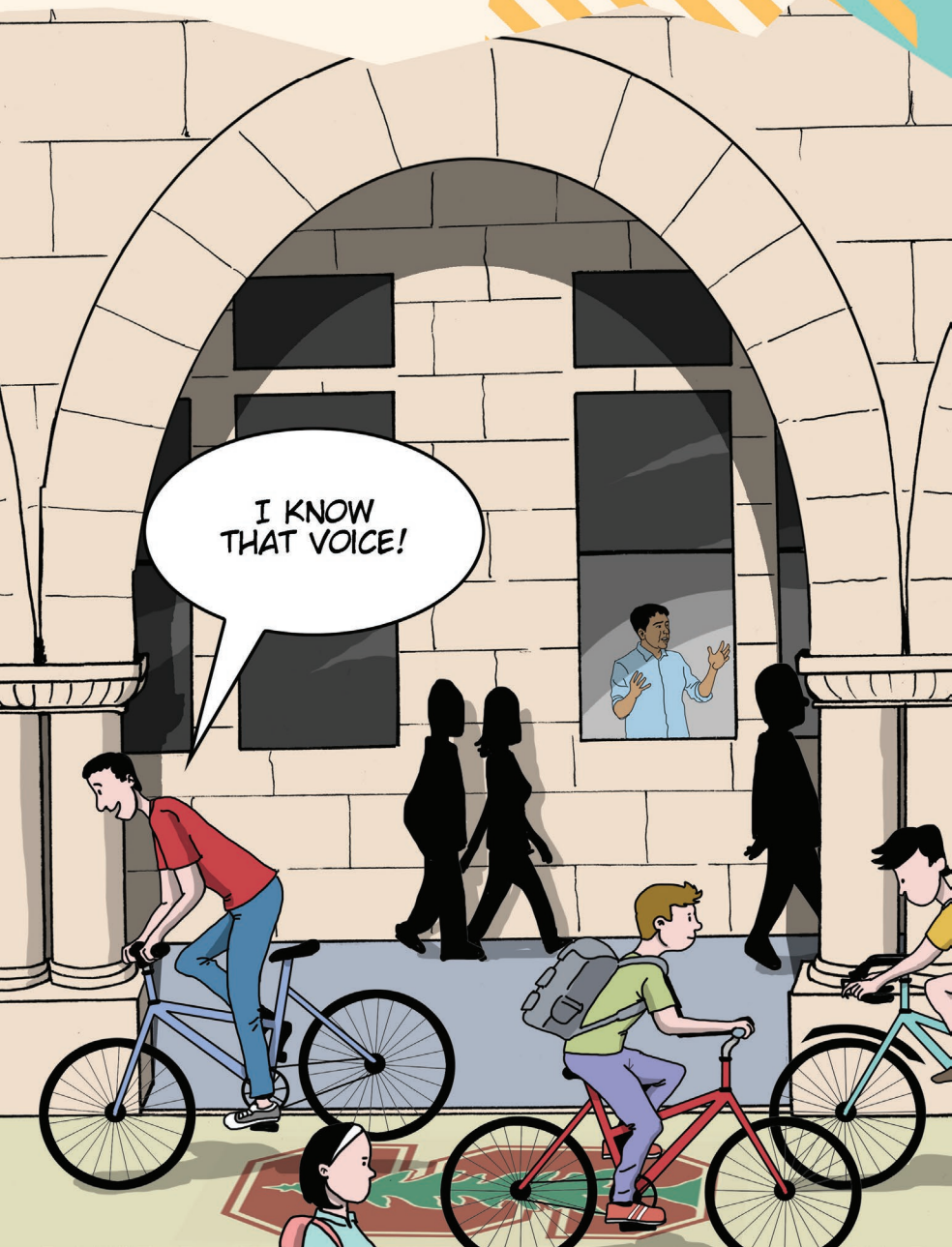
innovative solutions on the base. Out of this came an app that automated dentistry appointments for soldiers, as well as a management tool for the commanders to note when soldiers arrived at the base safely. This group also took charge of finishing TakeAway, complete with its Dan Ariely-inspired driver rankings, as well as the restaurant pre-ordering system. The mindset had shifted: Nobody was waiting for things to happen anymore, but rather keenly observing the world around them, noting what needed to be changed or improved, and taking initiative to break the mold and create change where necessary.

It took a strong leader like Ronit to allow for the highest ranks to be open to innovation outside our regular line of cybersecurity work, as well as to lend her attention and support to the suggestions of young officers. If someone had suggested to me when I joined the IDF that I would eventually be invited by the chief of staff, who is in charge of thousands of soldiers, to have coffee and discuss my entrepreneurial ideas with her, I probably would have said they were crazy. But I'm glad I gathered the courage to mention TakeAway because I learned from that meeting it's always worthwhile to take the leap.

If you have an idea you believe in, and that you think can make a change, reach out to the CEO of a company you're inspired by, or call up your boss and ask for a meeting, because you never know what might happen. Leaders often admire those who are willing to step out of the box if it means a better-run system will come out of it. As Jim Rohn once said, "If you're not willing to risk the unusual, you will have to settle for the ordinary." And who wants ordinary? No entrepreneur, that's for sure.

As I carry on through my career and personal life, I hope to take this lesson with me: In order to make change, and I mean *real, meaningful change*, I need to be willing to take a risk, reach out, and step into the discomfort of the unknown. Who knows what great changes will transpire?

CURIOSITY



“Always try to learn more and more. You don’t need to be the expert. You don’t need to be the best person in the room [or] in the field, but definitely try to understand what others are talking about so you know what’s going on around you.”

Rom Eliaz, *Founder and Managing Director, Elrom Ventures*

“Send cold emails (i.e., email even people you don’t know); 90% of them may fail, but you’ll only remember the 10% that succeed. We live in a unique time where just about every person on the planet (only a slight exaggeration) is reachable with just a few words and the right subject line.”

Drew Bent, *Knight-Hennessy Scholar, Stanford University; Teacher, Khan Lab School*

“Get really deep into something so that you become one of the world’s experts in a very specific, highly specialized niche. Then later in life, once you’re armed with unique knowledge, a good network, and business experience, you can be an unstoppable entrepreneur.”

Russell Rothstein, *Founder and CEO, IT Central Station*

“There’s a limit to how much you can plan. A lot happens by doing. You discover a lot of new things about your passions, about what you really connect to, what you care about, by getting out there and starting to do things.”

Anat Binur - *Co-Founder and CEO, Ukko; Former Investment Partner, Innovation Endeavors*

“At my very core, I like to think about new ideas, break new ground, and ask the questions that will lead other researchers and engineers and companies to think about the next generation of products.”

Alon Halevy, *Director, Facebook AI*

The way we respond to challenges determines where we'll find opportunities. Your startup fails? One entrepreneur might quit the game while another might pivot and end up with a billion-dollar company. Some choose to see the world as a place of probable failures, while others, filled with endless curiosity, might see the same world as a place ripe with opportunities.

I always found myself to be very curious, the type of kid who couldn't stop asking questions: Why is the sky blue? Why is every bird call different? Why do some houses use brick and others use cement? Which is better? How do rockets work? This was only fueled by the fact that I spent years of my life growing up just a few minutes from Stanford. I couldn't help but hear about Stanford-based projects and innovations from my classmates, my parents, or even from my tennis instructor, who studied biochemistry there—and all of this raised my curiosity level.

Throughout elementary school, I didn't quite know how renowned Stanford is, but I certainly knew it was a place full of opportunity seekers: students who were curious and who wanted to invent things, think about how society is constructed, and change the world. As I grew up, in the back of my mind, I always thought of Stanford as a crazy dream that maybe one day would come to fruition. But my family moved back to Israel, and my Stanford dreams quickly faded away.

Once I was back in Israel, I knew that at 18, I would be joining the Israeli Defense Forces. I knew I wanted to

try to get accepted into an elite unit in the IDF, which would require many years of training and service. Like many of my Israeli friends who were enlisting, going to university was not the imminent thing on my mind.

In high school, I took all the AP classes I could fit in my schedule, and I participated in countless extracurriculars, but it was never with the hopes of it helping me attend university. I did not have that pressure, and probably because of this, my high school experience was made a lot more fun and stress-free than many high schoolers who can find themselves at 17 having to compete for university acceptance. I was actually free to do what I loved and not worry how it would look to an admissions board.

I *was* preoccupied, however, with what I would do at the IDF. At 17, a year before I entered the IDF, I started going through a series of exams that would eventually determine where I would be placed. Was I going to be accepted to the coveted Air Force Flight Academy? Was I going to be accepted to the Elite Technology Unit? Would I be placed in other units? After a year of exams, boot camps, and more exams, I was exhilarated to learn I was accepted to both the Air Force Flight Academy and the Elite Technology Unit, which meant I would be able to choose where I wanted to go. Each required its own specialized training, meaning I would commit to several years in the IDF in addition to the mandatory three years. It was a tough choice. Was I going to be an IDF pilot like my dad was? Should I choose cybersecurity, working to develop technologies broadly applicable not just to the military, but across all fields? I chose cyber because of its growing impact on so many aspects of our

lives and probably also because I was (and still am) a computer geek.

In addition to whatever computer coding training I had entered the IDF with (enough to pass the long series of entrance tests), after finishing the first few months of general basic training, I was sent to a special cyber coding school. This was an incredible experience. Later, I would be chosen to attend the Officers' Academy and receive incredible training there, not only in cyber technology but in leadership and group dynamics, which would teach me the skills necessary to lead life-saving intelligence missions and to take on significant leadership positions within my unit.

But only when the years of service were nearing their end, when I was at age 23, did I start to contemplate what I wanted to do with my skills and experiences upon re-entering civilian (non-military) life. I reflected back on my time founding AnyMeal and Hacking Generation Y—what did I want to do next? I had been living a constant adrenaline rush during my years at the IDF, running breathless from one mission to another, foregoing sleep and fighting the clock to develop urgently needed technologies. I knew I had gained valuable engineering skills in the IDF. I knew I wanted to make a difference. I aspired to do something big, hopefully helping and impacting billions of people. Offers from startups started rolling in. Offers from investors.

Still, I wanted to take the time to do something different. I wanted to gain a greater perspective on life, politics, history, social problems, philosophy, and psychology, in addition to gaining more engineering skills. I had a deep urge to learn and an unsatisfied curiosity to expand my horizons beyond what was already my so-called area of

expertise. I wanted to pause for a few years before taking on my life's projects. I wanted to broaden my horizons, sharpen my intellect, and learn from others.

Israel has incredible universities. But I wanted a change. I wanted to apply to a university in the United States. Given my IDF schedule (I was still enlisted), however, I had missed all the SAT deadlines. There was one last opportunity to take the test to qualify for the next year—but only in New York! For a few weeks, during the few free hours I managed to find each night after a day on base, I crammed for the SAT. Then, I jumped on a cheap red-eye flight from Tel Aviv to New York, stumbled out of the plane jet-lagged, and sat through the test, only to come back to Israel on the next flight out (in order to immediately report back to my base). I wasn't going to let something as technical as a standardized testing location get in the way of my dream. I worked on the rest of the application during the hours I was let off base, and I hoped for the best, always keeping Stanford in the back of my mind as a childhood fantasy.

Harvard, Princeton, and UPenn were the first to answer: *You're in!* I couldn't believe my luck! What an incredible honor. I would have been so lucky to go to any one of these outstanding schools. But finally, at 1 a.m. Israel time a few nights later, I got another notification. Though I was training at the base, I was living in a shared apartment a few minutes away. I groggily turned over in bed and clicked on my phone. The notification read: *Your application portal has an update. Click here to view it.* Stanford's decisions had been released. I jumped out of bed sweating, my heart in my throat. Hands shaking so hard I was barely able to tap my phone, I clicked *open portal*.

Congratulations! it read. I stopped reading there (sorry, Stanford admissions). I immediately teared up and ran across the neighborhood to my parents' house, calling my entire family for an impromptu midnight party. By far, this was one of the best moments of my life; we all sang and danced, gushing on how I would be going back to the place I had always seen as a childhood dream, a hub of opportunity.

The next morning, I immediately went with my Stanford acceptance letter to the commanders in my unit. Understanding that this was an incredible opportunity, they were hugely supportive and gave me their blessing so I could start the next school year on time. I was able to commit to Stanford! Flash forward a few months: I was on a plane to Palo Alto, ready to move in.

My move into Stanford was really easy. Although all my family was away in Israel, Abe and Marian Sofaer, great people and friends of my parents, offered me a home away from home during move-in, as well as incredible Shabbat dinners. A good friend of mine, Dan Chaitas, helped me lug the furniture into my dorm (which I learned had a Kilimanjaro theme for the year, rather symbolic for me). Everything was cool: I was going to live the dream. But when I saw all of the other students tearfully saying goodbye to their families and hanging up Polaroids of their high school mascots and prom nights on the wall, it hit me: I was so much *older than them*. Of course, I knew this going into Stanford, but it really dawned on me that first day just how different my experience at college would be.

As a 23-year-old, I was coming into college with different priorities and a different mindset than most of my classmates around me. I found myself no longer

excited about frats or parties, something that seemed such a wonderful part of college life to me before. I was interested in one thing and one thing only: to try to immerse myself in as many of the learning opportunities that Stanford had to offer as possible while finding like-minded friends who would push me along the way.

Still, even with this goal in mind, I couldn't help but feel deeply conflicted as to whether starting at Stanford had been the right choice. The age gap between me and the others on my dorm floor was proving relatively significant: I was, after all, even older than the resident assistants who were in charge of me in the dorm. But the more my age and experience became obvious to me, the more I reminded myself that regardless of the social confusion that might come with the five-year age gap, I was at Stanford for a reason.

And that reason was my deep curiosity for what I could discover about the world on Stanford campus—a curiosity that had only sharpened with age. Because I was unconcerned with partying or living without my parents for the first time (been there, done that), I was able to pursue my goals with greater focus. First, I wanted to become a better global citizen. I wanted to understand what the world was all about and better grasp the intricacies of international problems. Second, I wanted to become a stronger engineer by furthering my studies of mathematics and computer science in the field of artificial intelligence. Lastly, I wanted to gain inspiration from the entrepreneurs and changemakers across all fields who come together at Stanford and in the surrounding area. Given that I was studying in the heart of Silicon Valley, I was determined to cold email founders of transformative companies, sneak my way into classes from all

departments to hear a top venture capital guest lecture, and use every day as an opportunity to meet new people. Quite literally, I lived across the street from some of the world's greatest entrepreneurs.

This all kicked into gear on my first day of class. I put on my new Stanford Dri-FIT shirt, combed my hair, and headed out—the oldest freshman in the game. I pulled up my phone to check where my class was and then—*crap*. I would have to bike through the *circle of death*. Now, at Stanford, the circle of death is a nightmare for any freshman. A three-foot wide roundabout where every corner of campus comes together in a free-for-all, life-or-death biking frenzy, it's downright terrifying. But, distracting myself by thinking up all of the ways the roundabout could be more efficient (such as the creation of two bidirectional lanes allowing for cyclists to go their respective directions without body-slamming one another), I made it through. I took a deep breath: passing through the circle of death *every day*? It was going to be a long quarter.

When I reached the lecture hall of my first class, I immediately went to the front row (one of the promises I had made to myself was that I would always sit in the front row). The class, called “The Spirit of Democracy”, was co-taught by Larry Diamond and Jim Fishkin, two of the leading world experts in political science. I remember so vividly sitting down and looking up at Professor Diamond's face. Here was a man who founded and directed the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law; formed a community that leveraged technological collaboration between Silicon Valley and human rights activists across the world; was an inspiration for countless leaders on how to conduct their

nations; and had written books on democracy that were cornerstone for people fighting for democracy—and *I* got to study with him? I felt like the luckiest 23-year-old freshman in the world.

As Professor Diamond started going over the syllabus, he quickly skipped through the drudgery: when our first exam would be or the specifics of the homework deadline policy. Instead, he spent his time talking about an experiment he and Professor Fishkin ran together, “America in One Room”, to determine if strong deliberation could save American democracy and bring opposite sides of the political spectrum together. The experiment had been a great success, and as Professor Diamond described it, he began tearing up.

As I watched the professor who would become my new mentor shed tears of excitement moments into my first day of college, I knew I was in the right place. The raw authenticity of this professor suggested he wasn’t just here to teach material. He was there because his work *mattered* to him. He wanted to make change, inspire students, and help us see the world differently.

Professor Diamond told us he spends his academic career asking himself questions. He is forever wondering why countries fall in and out of democracy and what drives nations toward healthy democratic structure. *Why this leader? Why now? What if they had done something differently? What if the public had revolted at this moment?* It was clear that Professor Diamond did what he did because of curiosity, passion, and mission: It looked like he was moved by a force greater than himself, and he could not stop himself from continuing forward. He has dedicated his life to questioning the world around him and to trying to make it a better place for so

many people. To me, that is what curiosity and dedication are all about.

Now, whenever I meet a new person, I ask them: *Why do you do what you do?* Why are you starting that job or taking that class? In turn, I ask myself: *Michael, what can you learn from this person?* I push myself to discover how other people's curiosities and passions can influence mine.

One day, my goal of seizing every opportunity at Stanford was put to the test. As I was riding my bike across campus, I heard a voice coming from a classroom. I couldn't quite place where I had heard it before, but I just *knew* I had heard it. So, I hopped off my bike and walked into the classroom where the voice was coming from. Lo and behold, lecturing in front of 20 students was Sal Khan of Khan Academy.

I was immediately brought back to seventh grade, when I had spent my whole summer teaching myself Algebra II so I could enter into a more advanced math level the following fall. The thing that made me successful? A YouTuber named Sal Khan, whose videos I watched several hours a day.

I ran up to him after the lecture. "Sal!" I exclaimed. "You taught me Algebra II over the summer when I was 14—you're the reason I was able to skip my mathematics year and join an accelerated math class." We laughed as I told him after watching his lectures so many times, I knew his voice well enough to wander in from the road.

My life felt surreal. Here I was just riding my bike when a voice drew me in. So, following my curiosity, I walked into the classroom and ended up speaking to a person who transformed education through nonprofit work. He explained to me how his whole journey with

education began with a couple of videos he had filmed at his desk, explaining basic mathematical concepts to his niece. From there, his videos went viral, and he began working to democratize education. Sal, now considered a leading expert on the dissemination of information through technology, talked to me about how we can utilize gamification and free network-based resources to bring education to billions of people. And that was all just on a random Tuesday afternoon!

Now, yes, this happened at Stanford, and there is no question it is an incredible university that brings thought leaders together. But these sorts of meetings don't have to happen on campuses, and they certainly don't have to happen all by chance. The important thing is building up the confidence to go out and take the extra step, to find a mentor by reaching out to them, and to believe in yourself enough to let your curiosity, not your fear or lack of connections, guide you. Your mentor can be your high school teacher, someone who is running a school club or after school activity, someone in a nonprofit who is willing to devote time to meeting with you, someone else in your town, or someone that you can reach online. These are only a few examples of the many people around you can look to for mentorship.

As I started to take more and more advantage of campus and all of the phenomenal resources we had there, I wanted to start tapping into the world beyond Stanford: Silicon Valley. Now, I've always believed that if you want to work your way into a new community, it's best to try and find someone with whom you share something in common. For me, I realized that there were 70,000 Israelis living in the Bay Area.

I ended up connecting with Shuly Galili and Gil Ben-Artzy, co-founders of UpWest, a venture capital fund that helps Israeli startups come to Silicon Valley. It turned out their offices were closer to my dorm than my computer science class (and I didn't have to pass the circle of death to get there!). As I continued to visit every week, they brought me in almost as if I were a portfolio company—as if they were investing in *me*.

They spent their time and energy exposing me to the Silicon Valley ecosystem in a very meaningful way, and for this I will forever be grateful. Around the same time, I was fortunate to meet up with Marc Abramowitz, a very successful investor, and Oded Hermoni, the founder of a venture capital firm called J-Ventures. We hit it off and agreed to grab coffee in Palo Alto. When I sat down with Oded, he offered me (with the very kind support of Marc) a position as an associate at his VC firm.

J-Ventures is a particularly special venture capital fund because of the incredible community members that it brings together. It consists of more than 200 limited partners, most of whom are serial entrepreneurs, partners in other leading funds, or current executives at well-respected companies. Oded, the managing partner of the fund, had previously invested in *unicorns* (companies worth over a billion dollars) through his work at Rhodium. He created this fund with a mission to bring together investors with zero ego to invest in great companies as a group.

Holy crap, I thought. I just had coffee with a fantastic investor, and he's already offering me a job? Well, almost a year later, I'm a senior associate at the firm. I have learned about how investments are made, as well as how to best source and analyze a company. Through

Oded, I've gained the confidence to dive headfirst into the tech investment scene. I get to explore what some of the latest and greatest entrepreneurs are working on, and I find myself inspired every day. An AI and cybersecurity enthusiast myself, I especially enjoy hearing about how entrepreneurs are taking their knowledge in those fields and applying it to solve real-world issues.

One company, BeeHero, for example, places artificial intelligence inside beehives to detect when bees are unhealthy. They then take this information and use it both to save the bees and help farmers optimize bee colonization. Another company, MDGo, uses sensors within vehicles to provide better information on car crashes, allowing auto companies to increase the safety of their newer models.

No matter where you are in the world, or in life, do your best to take ownership of your own dreams and goals. I learned that for myself, by reaching out, I've formed many new friendships in the valley and became a part of the J-Ventures community. Not only have I found an incredible tech scene for myself but an incredible community as well.

When I walk into the J-Venture monthly meetings, I am seated amongst 200 top investors and executives in Silicon Valley. We sit in a room together, and for one entire evening, we hear pitches on deals, discuss investments, and secure new partnerships—and I get to be a part of it all. The first time I ever walked into one of these meetings, my jaw dropped. I saw a room full of people I only knew by reading their biographies. I saw the former CFO of Ford Mobility, a key executive of Levi's. I saw a member of the first board of directors of Starbucks Coffee and countless people who have run

and sold billions of dollars' worth of companies. I was surrounded by the biggest people making the biggest deals, and I was in the middle of it.

There is such an invaluable wealth of knowledge and experience in all these people. As I started to learn more from those surrounding me about what it means to be an entrepreneur, I wanted to share this knowledge with other people. Taking an idea my friend Mickey had started in Israel, I started making a Silicon Valley short interview and information series called *TLDR* (too long; didn't read). The premise was that I would interview CEOs and startup founders and then compress what they had told me into one-minute bits summarizing what their companies were doing. The goal was to easily deliver valuable advice and information from some of the most experienced entrepreneurs in the world to anyone who wanted to watch in a matter of seconds.

Many of my friends initially thought this was hysterical! But I was immensely curious to uncover the stories of these innovators. What I realized as I had coffee with each CEO and founder was that no matter their background—biotech, fashion, artificial intelligence—they all shared something in common: If they were genuinely interested in an idea or a question, they'd find a way to pursue it.

Let me digress a bit and share another story about curiosity and persistence, a story about something that happened to me in high school, well before my time in Stanford. It also led me on an exciting, completely unpredictable path and taught me an important life lesson, this time from someone who became my mentor—Dan Arieli. I was a high school senior and looking for inspiration for my capstone project. I didn't know what my

project would look like, but I had been interested in the idea of using psychology and economics to better understand consumer behavior. I read Dan Ariely's book *Predictably Irrational*, and immediately, I was hooked.

Professor Dan Ariely's story began at the age of 17, when a tragic accident left him with third-degree burns on 70 percent of his body. He had been at a graduation ceremony with his friends when a firework went off, badly injuring him.

"The fire nearly killed me,"¹ he writes in his memoir, *Irrationally Yours*.

He wasn't sure if he'd ever be able to walk or move again.

During the three years he spent hospitalized after the accident, he began to observe how nurses treated burn victims differently. Ariely wrote, "Since I had little else to do and badly needed distraction, I began to notice and record things."

He noticed that some nurses would tear the patient's skin bandages off incredibly quickly while others would do it slowly. It was well known that tearing them off quickly was much more painful. So, curious about the disparity in the nurse's techniques, Dan asked a doctor if the nurses had been trained to do it one way or another. Of course, the doctor replied, they were all trained to take them off slowly. Determined to figure out why some nurses would rip them off quickly then, Dan asked the nurses themselves. What he found was that nurses ripped the bandages off quickly because they cared so much about the patients and wanted to get the painful task over with, even though this actually meant

1 Dan Ariely and William Haefeli, *Irrationally Yours: On Missing Socks, Pickup Lines and Other Existential Puzzles* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015).

inflicting more pain. Though illogical, simply tearing off the bandage seemed to some nurses to cause less pain than having to slowly peel them. They were scared of causing pain and in turn caused more of it.

Dan Ariely found this fascinating. He took note of the fact that the nurses' decisions were irrational in that they proved to be inconsistent with their own motivations and desires.

This led Professor Dan Ariely to start his life's work: exploring how bias and emotion can lead us to act irrationally against our own desires. As I read about his work, I too grew fascinated by this, and I decided to conduct a six-month research report inspired by the book. I was so deeply curious and enchanted by it that it was almost all I could think about for those six months. Allowing my intrinsic pull toward the material to guide me, I related my research to current marketing, fake news, and the intersection between technology and psychology. The culmination of my hard work was a lengthy report and a 20-minute presentation to one-third of the school.

As I opened my presentation, I explained the following example of everyday irrational behavior: If you go to a store and there are three bottles of wine, one for \$8, one for \$27, and one for \$33, most people will opt for the \$27 bottle. This is because people typically avoid buying either the most or least expensive item on a shelf. If, however, the store then adds a \$55 bottle to the shelf, most people will opt to buy the \$33 bottle instead of the \$27 one. This is a common tactic used by many shops. But why do we do this? When we get home and open the bottle of wine, we only care about whether or not it tastes good in comparison to how much we paid for it. Therefore, whatever else is on the shelf should not, in

theory, impact our buying decisions at the store. But it does.

Prior to the work of behavior economists, like Dan Ariely, prevailing economic theory assumed humans to be decision-making creatures who based their decisions off of the expected utility gain in each option presented to them. The famous expected utility equation attempted to model human decision-making by multiplying the odds of gain by the gain's value. The decision we make will be the one that gives us the greatest expected gain. What Dan Ariely and Daniel Gilbert, another economist from Harvard, did, along with other researchers, is offer an alternative theory. My school report was based on their ideas, the summary of which claimed that rationality differs from person to person and that we each have a *change bias*: a bias that allows our emotions to affect the way we make our decisions.

A great example of their ideas is as follows: You are going to see a play. You have put ten dollars in your pocket with the intention of buying a ticket once you arrive at the theater. When you get to the theater, you realize that you have lost the ten dollars. Do you withdraw another ten dollars to buy a ticket? A majority of people say yes. When you change the scenario, however, to be that you have purchased the ticket for ten dollars *ahead of time*, and you instead lose the *ticket*, the majority of people claim they would not buy a new ticket at the theater. Now this, of course, is entirely irrational because the financial constraints in both situations remain the same. Human beings, thanks to bias and emotions, are ultimately irrational decision-makers.

When I received positive feedback on my presentation, I decided to cold email Professor Dan Ariely. I told him

that I loved his work and would love to chat with him if he ever had the time. His response? “Sure!” I always tell people about this email to remind them that you never know when a renowned leader might agree to sit down with you. You never know if the person you meet in the dining hall will be your future co-founder, or if you feel tired but decide to still go to class, you’ll end up meeting Susan Rice (true story). Whether by chance, long-shot attempt, or careful planning, you will find opportunities for yourself if you follow your curiosity.

In this particular instance, Professor Dan Ariely offered me a job as an intern in his team at Irrational Labs. There, for several months in between high school and my IDF service, I worked with him and his team to assist startups in utilizing behavioral economics to improve their engagement, conversions, and billings. In short, I was lucky to be part of Ariely’s team consulting companies on psychology and economics in order to optimize their operations.

I spent the summer conducting research on how married couples should manage their financial decisions (at age 17 and incredibly single). As a result of this research, I was even able to partner on a project with IDC Herzliya (a well-respected university in Israel), for which I interviewed renowned Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert. The experiences were endless, and it was all because I had sent a chance email from Israel to Silicon Valley.

Let’s fast-forward and get back to the present. When COVID swept across the world, I had to stop my *TLDR* coffee chats because I could no longer meet with people in person. Instead, I started having these meetings by Zoom. It was then that I had the idea to pivot from

my one-minute, highly condensed videos with entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley, into taping and publishing unedited, twenty-minute conversations I held with CEOs and entrepreneurs from all over the world! Proximity was no longer a consideration, and the new format allowed for much more information to be shared.

Since then, I have been running a show called *20 Minute Leaders*. Through the program, I have interviewed the former CFO of Oracle and current partner at Bessemer Venture Partners, as well as multiple CEOs of unicorns, Broadway actresses, authors, musical directors, and so on. With more than 200 episodes to show for it, I have started creating a virtual community where leaders can share, with anyone interested in watching, their experiences, what curiosity means to them, and how it led them to where they are today.

In these interviews, they provide tips and suggestions for young entrepreneurs and talk about their products, challenges, management styles, views about the future for technology, and artistic creations. My favorite thing to ask each interviewee when we meet? That same question I mentioned earlier: *Why do you do what you do?*

As it would turn out, this endeavor became the lead-in to my next adventure. These past couple of months, in lockdown and away from the Stanford campus because of COVID-19, I took a chance and applied to work at a tech unicorn whose CEO I was pursuing to interview for a *20 Minute Leaders* episode. I was fortunate to get the job and now I am thrilled to be employed as a software engineer at Hippo Insurance, which is on the cusp of an exciting IPO, while continuing my university studies online. And the CEO filmed a fantastic episode for *20 Minute Leaders*!

At Hippo, I found myself again in unique and inspiring situations. When COVID-19 caused some offices to close down, Hippo kept theirs open as much as possible (under safety guidelines, of course). While many employees found themselves working from home, I decided to go in (wearing my mask) to the office almost every day. There, for the past few months, I found myself one of only a handful of people on-site at Hippo. My office-mate? The CEO himself.

Suddenly, I found myself—in an office intended for hundreds of people—alone with the legendary CEO of Hippo, Assaf Wand. I began participating in top management meetings and discussions, and I even found myself listening to Assaf as he bounced ideas off of me. Now, I frequently ask him to use me as a *duck*: someone to explain everything to in great detail and who promises to listen attentively but offers no advice back (well, most of the time, anyway). I wouldn't have had this incredible lens into Assaf's mind if I hadn't insisted on going to the office every day.²

Reflecting on my experiences, there are a few things I learned. For one, I learned I need to be brave enough to reach out to anyone at any company or organization I want to be a part of, even if I have little reason to believe they'd take interest in me. I need to not get discouraged

2 Undoubtedly, there are many more people who inspired me and helped me throughout my journey and to whom I owe gratitude. Dror Berman, a role model since our first meeting about *AnyMeal*; Roy Glasberg, a wonderful friend and source of inspiration; Nilesh Trivedi, a great mentor who dedicated time to helping me become a better investor; Amir Shevat, who gave me countless words of advice and unending friendship; Neta Krakover, a mentor in and out of our team at Hippo; Zack Rinat, kind and generous with my projects and endeavors; Yasmin Lukatz, a great friend who gives her all to driving Israeli innovation to the highest levels in Silicon Valley; Dov Moran, a true inspiration who gives me continuous support; and Julie Zelenski and Pat Hanrahan, devoted mentors who showed me and my peers incredible care at Stanford.

by rejections (which do come often) and keep trying. I need to build the confidence it takes to believe that even if I don't get the responses I'm looking for, it only means I should try and find different ways to pursue my goals.

Second, I learned in hindsight that often the simplest actions, like taking a front-row seat in lecture or in an office meeting, can make a significant impact. Because more than anything else, these simple actions communicate that you're invested in your environment, you're committed to learning from the people around you, and you're willing to put in the effort to do it. Of course, I can't promise these behaviors alone will create opportunities, but as you continue with your education and entrepreneurial endeavors, I think that keeping these in mind will be beneficial.

So, take a seat in the front row of your classroom or office meeting. Ask questions. Be engaged. You'll be surprised how much more interesting everything will be for you, and how much you will learn. Look at your teacher, professor or boss with attention: She might be looking back at you, and she'll probably give you more of her time when you come speak to her after class. And if you hear a voice that draws you in as you're biking around? Stop what you're doing and follow it.



RELATIONSHIPS



“Even if you really feel you don’t need ‘help,’ surround yourself with people who can and will provide advice, counsel and support. Being a founder can be pretty lonely.”

Cindy Padnos, *Founder and Managing Partner, Illuminate Ventures*

“At the end of the day, your startup is nothing without awesome people that make it awesome.”

Amir Shevat, *Co-Founder and CPO, Reshuffle*

“To me, there is nothing more important than mentorship. Get yourself a mentor, not one but three if you can, from the walks of life that you think you want to participate in.”

Isaac Applbaum, *Co-Founder, MizMaa Ventures*

“When thinking about relationships with other people in life and business, always think in terms of decades. All meaningful things take time to nurture, and you want people who will be around for the long run. Ultimately, people are the only thing that will really matter on your journey through life.”

Prasanna Srikhanta, *Angel Investor*

“At the end of the day, whether it’s in your personal or professional life, it’s all about the people. Cherish the people you meet. Build relationships, and never take them for granted. Also, a thank you goes a long way.”

Carly Malatskey, *Science Technology and Society, Stanford University; Two-time NCAA champion*

As I sit here writing the final chapter of this book, it seems necessary to conclude with the element in my life that fills me with more happiness and gratitude than any other: my relationships. Every entrepreneur will tell you that finding the right people to work with is necessary to creating a successful business. I would add that relationships outside the business sphere can help just as much. Especially in the face of so much failure and uncertainty—two constants in entrepreneurship of any kind—counting on the support of those closest to me has given me the strength to move forward. As I reflect on the successes and setbacks that make up this book, it becomes increasingly clear to me that I would not be where I am today without a strong community of people guiding me along.

This final chapter is a personal reflection on how the people around me have helped shape my journey.

I believe the strongest, most central group of relationships I have is my family. My family is my anchor: I understand who I am through their unwavering support. Family has always been the group to call at all hours of the day—or rather, a group so telepathic with me that they call me first because they've just had a hunch I needed to hear their voice. Growing up, I was incredibly involved in extracurriculars, constantly trying my hand at new activities and often struggling along the way. So, knowing I always had a pack of people holding me up was invaluable. It never really mattered if we *liked* each other. Often my siblings and I would bicker in the back

seat of the car or across our rooms at home, but that's normal. What mattered was that, if I had a rough day or started doubting myself, I could turn to people who always believed in me and listened to my worries without judgment.

My parents have been my primary support system. When I was younger, I saw my parents as superheroes (OK, maybe I still do). They were two of the busiest people I knew—my dad, Yossi, being a VP of Engineering at Google and my mom, Shavit, a successful international lawyer—and yet they never missed a single thing I did. No matter what it was—sports, performing arts, robotics, or conference presentations—they were there. Time and again, they made time outside of their jobs to sit in the front row at my middle school theater performance (even when I was just a tree!).

I don't think I ever saw any other parents go to as many events as mine did, and that made me feel grateful. And yet, it wasn't that I desperately wanted them to watch my robot shoot a basket or hear me deliver my lines. It was about knowing no matter what that they were *there*. If I messed up or made a mistake, they would still clap. If I got stage fright and forgot my lines, they would still look up at me encouragingly. There was no failure so great that it would hamper their belief in me, and because of that, I felt comfortable becoming a risk-taker.

My siblings, Lian and Or, are similar. Because my sister is 13 years older than I am, and my brother is eight years older, I always viewed them as a second set of parents. Only, these parents were super cool (sorry, Mom and Dad). Whether they were helping me through bullying in elementary school or supporting me through a failed relationship in high school, they were always right by

my side. I cannot even begin to count the number of hours I have spent pouring out my feelings to my sister and brother. Emotions aside, they also inspired me professionally. Or, a brilliant musician and composer, taught me what it means to pour my heart into my work. Lian, one of the most creative, original thinkers I know, founded and led a startup while raising kids—showing me how to work and love more fully. And if I weren't lucky enough, they brought me two new wonderful siblings as well! Lian brought Peretz—her husband—and Or brought Chloe—his wife. They also gave me three beautiful nieces who bring joy and amazement to me every single day: Mai Tzipora, Alma, and Cora Tzipora, my three little rays of sunshine.

My grandparents, almost 70 years older than I am, served as my third set of parents. All of them have lived through extreme hardships, losing much of their immediate family in the Holocaust and struggling through times of poverty and war. They devoted their lives to building themselves, the state of Israel, and their family, all the while stressing education, loyalty, and kindness above everything else. My Savta Zippi (Tzipora)—*savta* means grandmother in Hebrew—whose father fled Communist Russia at 18 and came alone and penniless to the land of Israel (then still called Palestine) in the early 1920s, would tell me stories of innovation through hardship and entrepreneurial endeavors from carpentry and agriculture to engineering. Her stories inspired me to confront obstacles with her level of strength and determination. She taught me to always try, try, and try again.

My Saba Moshik—*saba* means grandfather in Hebrew—lost most of his family in Poland in the

Holocaust. He dedicated his life to building Israel's security; he was and still is my biggest advocate in everything I do. My other Saba Moshe (who sadly passed away recently) taught me empathy through his life stories and lessons, as he had survived unspeakable tragedies in the Holocaust as a young boy. He and my other *savta* (who unfortunately passed away many years before I was born) together taught me the greatest lesson of all: love. Since the passing of his wife (my grandma) Annie—a brilliant, trailblazing engineer who made it only to the age of 35—my grandfather devoted himself to raising my father and aunt (who lost their mother at the tender age of 6 and 8 respectfully) and remained steadfastly loyal to Annie's memory to his dying day at the age of 94. Not a single week would go by without my *saba* telling me a story about his beautiful bride. I don't know if I ever told him this, but he is my role model when it comes to true, eternal love. Rest in peace, Saba Moshe and Savta Annie.

I cannot express enough gratitude for having this rock-solid, (mostly) non-judgmental group of people in my life, and I know I probably do not thank them as much as I should. So, to my beautiful, hysterical, sometimes dysfunctional, and inspirational family: Thank you from the bottom of my heart.¹

But what about the family you *do* choose? For me, friends are just as fundamental to my happiness and personal growth as my family. I consider my friends my family; they're just the family I had the honor and fortune of picking myself.

¹ And my deepest gratitude to my uncles and aunt, Neri, Liat, and Danny, for their support and care; to my cousins, Annie and Adam; and to the rest of the extended family.

Ever since I was little, I have had a deep desire to form strong, meaningful friendships. I grew up watching the typical high school cliques form and shift, break apart, and re-conglomerate. I wanted absolutely nothing to do with it. If rumors spread and a clique broke up—how strong were they really to begin with? If a friendship only spans a few weeks, how well did you know that person, anyway? Luckily for me, I was never really invited to be in the cliques. I mean, I don't think it is of any surprise to anyone reading this book that I wasn't the most popular guy in class.

In high school, during every morning assembly, the principal would ask if students had any announcements. I would go up to the auditorium stage, get in line, and give my announcement for that week's robotics match. Then I would hand the microphone off to the next person and get back in line to make another announcement. I would do this until all of my activities' announcements had been made: sports games, theater performances, band recitals, student council, you name it. So, yeah, I was probably not the most well-liked guy in class, even if I was well respected.

But, as I've said, I never saw this as a downside. I'd even say it helped me find people who truly became my chosen family in life. The friends I made loved me for me, not because I was a part of a cool group or clique. The result? I found five new brothers.

The first of the group is Mickey Halsvasky. We met at the photoshoot for *Forbes Israel's* "18 Under 18". Today he is the CEO of the startup Avian and is a well-known figure in the Israeli tech ecosystem. He was this suave guy with a sleek shirt and groomed beard, and I was the kid who brought my saxophone to be photographed with

because I thought it would make me look cool. Needless to say, I was slightly intimidated by him, but a couple of months later, I found myself calling him up to ask him to be an advisor for my startup, AnyMeal.

At first, we were coworkers. Mickey had great entrepreneurial experience and gave us insight into the problems we faced. Over months of us grabbing coffee, however, we slowly began to realize we got along very well. Coffee turned into weekend meetups, which turned into trips and retreats. All the while, Mickey was becoming a brother. It was even Mickey himself who introduced me to the next member of my Fantastic Six: Daniel Chernenkov.

Daniel started working for AnyMeal at Mickey's introduction. Because of our mutual friendship and admiration for Mickey, we quickly formed a great bond. We went on retreats for the company, and we wound up spending all night talking about anything from work strategy and tennis to our failed relationships and our dreams for the future.

Before I knew it, Mickey, Daniel, and I had formed the strongest group of three friends imaginable. It's often said you measure friendship by how well it holds up through the hard times. Well, the three of us had our fair share of tests. Most of them took place at 3 a.m., with each of us tearing up as we opened our hearts to the other two. I'm talking about getting dumped and being worried I'd never find love again. I'm talking about hardships in the IDF. I'm talking about failed entrepreneurial ventures. Whenever my WhatsApp lit up with a message from Mickey or Daniel saying, *I need you guys*, I dropped anything and came running to their door—even if it meant staying up until sunrise talking.

Next came Ido Bichler, whom I met while at a coding crash course for the IDF. He came in a few days late to the course, five feet, 10 inches, of pure muscle, and I have to admit I thought I wasn't going to like him. Make no mistake, Ido looked very nice, but I was pretty intimidated. I had formed friendships with others within the first few days, and for the duration of the three-month course, we didn't speak a single word. And keep in mind that this crash course was happening in the middle of the desert in a room with only 15 people.

Eventually, however, we exchanged our first words. I walked into the base one day and said, "Hey, I'm going to do a hackathon in London with Hacking Generation Y. Anyone want in?" Suddenly, I heard a voice I had never heard before. I looked over and sure enough, it was Ido saying, "Yeah, I'm down."

We met properly for the first time on our flight to Europe. When we got there, we competed in the hackathon together and realized we had a lot in common. Ido continued to help me organize future hackathons, and we became colleagues in the same army unit for four years. Professional teamwork aside, it was clear that Ido was quickly becoming my third brother.

The fourth was Dan Chaitas, whom I also met in the army. One day, I was sitting in the dining hall and he walked up to me. Out of nowhere, he said, "Michael! I'm super into marketing and love what you're doing with Hacking Generation Y. I want to help!" Of course, I said yes.

Again with the blessing of the IDF, we flew to Amsterdam together to compete in a hackathon while also preparing to host our own hackathon in Europe. We explored the city, went to bars, and did an escape room,

all while slowly but surely forming the start of a beautiful brotherhood. Back at the base, we began hanging out more regularly. We began confiding in each other about our fears and vulnerabilities. Soon enough, I introduced Dan to Ido, and we all ended up sharing an apartment in Tel Aviv for two years during our military service (with dedicated seats on the couch for Daniel and Mickey).

You have probably noticed a common thread by now: My friendships are not circumstantial. They're invested in and cultivated mindfully, growing out of shared core values and areas of interests. And, because they are all built on such a strong foundation, I believe these friendships have what it takes to withstand the test of time.

So what about number five? Now, he's a unique one, not only because he is the first non-Israeli, but he's the newest addition as well. I first met Santiago by chance at my first computer science lecture during my freshman year at Stanford. We both took seats next to each other in the middle of the front row. He told me he grew up in Mexico, and I immediately recognized him as the famous telenovela star who posted in our class Facebook group. He recognized me as the *Forbes* "30 Under 30" guy. I began telling him about running a startup at 17; he began telling me about his upbringing in Mexico City and his various entrepreneurial endeavors throughout high school. We both knew that after that conversation, a friendship had started.

Throughout freshman year, our friendship grew. We enrolled in every class together, brainstormed ideas with each other, and ran projects together, and these collaborations grew into going on actual runs together. We even shared a place during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have

found in him the same strength of friendship I found in my brothers back home.

In Hebrew, I call each of my brothers *achi*, and this is also how I greet my closest friends. Because, while we might not share blood, I truly do believe that my friends are just the family I had the privilege of choosing.²

And now I venture into the most beautiful and often most painful of relationships: love. Again, I want to preface this with an understanding that I am way too young to speak on love knowledgeably or wisely, but still, I feel I have an obligation to try. For me love is *the* most important thing in the world, and nothing else even comes close. If you don't trust me, take it from the 200 thought leaders I have interviewed in the past couple of months. When I ask each of them what they believe is the most crucial thing in life, they all say that finding the right person to share your life with is, above all, the most important. In my short lifetime, I have experienced a handful of successful and unsuccessful relationships. Through experience and reflection, I've learned a great deal from each one.

I had my first serious relationship as a senior in high school. My then-girlfriend and I had been friends for our entire lives, and she had seen me grow up. She had walked alongside me for all of my major milestones, as I had for hers. Then, at the beginning of 12th grade, we

2 There are so many more incredible friends on my journey that, even if I tried, I wouldn't be able to list in full: Ben Penchas, one of the smartest people I've met and a partner in crime on many crazy adventures; Abdulwahab Omira, a wonderful companion throughout my Stanford studies and a source of inspiration on facing adversity and on confidence; Roy Nicolet, my guide when it comes to relationships and ambitions; Amit Eliav, one of the most curious and genuine people I know, and a true mensch; Ryan Harden, my confidant throughout middle school and lifelong friend. And so many others.

decided to advance our relationship. Little did I know I was entering into the hardest six months of my life.

If you haven't figured it out already, I am a man of passion. When I am with somebody, I give myself 110 percent. I truly do believe I am the most loyal man on Earth when I am in love. I would do everything to make the people I care about happy, and in this relationship, I was willing to prioritize her over everything else in my life.

Now, of course, I think this is an important thing to do, but with *the right person for you*. With her, the more I gave, the more she retreated from me. I was beside myself with confusion and shame. I was flabbergasted. If I put in X, I'd get Y, so if I put in 2X, I should get 2Y. Right? I could not understand why the more I tried to love her and show my affection, the more she pulled away. I thought surely that what a person in love wants is to be *shown* that their partner loves them. After all, that's what *I* wanted. But instead, that was the opposite of what she needed and the opposite of how she would treat me.

My friends told me that during those six months I looked like a ghost of a man. I was this big, confident, entrepreneurial guy who did every AP and every extra-curricular, and yet suddenly, because of one girl, I was a puddle. I was totally fine facing rejection from VCs, from friends, from school administrators, and I was totally fine. And yet, my girlfriend's rejection had begun to make me feel like I was wasting away.

Two weeks before graduation, we decided to end the relationship. I was immensely thankful on two fronts: First, I regained my perspective. Almost immediately after the breakup, I was able to take a step back and see how silly I had been for wallowing in something that was doomed from the start. We were different people

who wanted different things. I didn't need to let my life fall apart because of that. Second, I was thankful because I got my friend back. I will always consider her a close friend.

Still, I came out of the relationship a bit distressed over what had happened. I was so concerned with how easy it was for me to lose myself in a relationship, and I knew something had to be done. After all, if I could face any business adversity and professional challenge in a calm and collected manner, only to melt when one romantic relationship failed, I was not ready to enter the real world.

So, I reached deep inside myself. I told myself that if I was not going to compromise on the quality of my work, then I would never again compromise on my quality of life. If something is wrong, I will look at it, analyze how I can make it better, and if I can't fix it after trying my best, I'll let it go.

I also learned how to love myself for the type of person I am, rather than be scared that my vulnerability and affection would drive people away. I am passionate, loyal, and loving, and I choose to show it to those I care about. I stopped seeing that as a confusing thing and started seeing it as an asset. For me, taking the time to reflect with myself was one of the most courageous things I have ever done. To confront my own greatest fears was ten times scarier than any pitch or robotics competition—but it was all worth it because it led me to a place where I could be in a healthy, stable relationship. And I was able to take these lessons with me to new, meaningful relationships, one very long one in particular with a very special and kind young woman while I was in the

IDF, until we both decided to go our separate ways and we parted as friends. And then I met Carly.

When I first came to Stanford, I said to myself, “OK, Michael, you’ve had your fair share of relationships. Let’s take the time to make some new friends and get acquainted with this new place, and let’s not worry about girls.” In short, I told myself not to go running off and falling in love. What did I do? I ran off and fell in love.

Two weeks into Stanford, I came across Carly on a dating app (thank you, Hinge!). I was immediately blown away. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen: a starting striker on the soccer team, a powerhouse entrepreneur, and a witty thinker. I *had* to get to know her. So, for about two months, I kind of chased her. Mainly, she just didn’t respond to me.

She did, however, end up winning the women’s national championship for soccer, so I guess I’ll forgive her for being a little busy during those first two months. Eventually, she agreed to go on a date with me, and then we went on another, and then another, until suddenly one day, I found myself in love. She is a remarkable woman who brings me more motivation and inspiration than I ever could have thought possible.

Words cannot express how thankful I am to her and our ever-deepening relationship. We continue to learn about each other and grow alongside each other every day. I am thrilled for our path and for our upcoming milestones.

It is amazing how the heart can affect every fiber of our being. I have learned that while a detrimental relationship can make you feel shattered or, even worse, invisible, a positive relationship can make you feel like Superman.

So, as I reflect on this first chapter of my life as a young entrepreneur—a chapter that has brought me such adventure, challenge, risk, failure, and success—I can't stress enough how helpful it is to face each step of the journey alongside people who can support you. I prioritize my relationships with those I love over everything else, and I dedicate myself to constantly working toward making these connections stronger. You can have all the success in the world, but what good is success if you succeed alone? For me, family, friends, a partner by your side—*those* are the things that will give my life meaning. As entrepreneurs, we pride ourselves in creating innovations that reach people in new ways, meeting needs that haven't been met and building systems that have a broad impact on humanity. Even if the skills we use to build these systems may be highly technical, it's a love of people—and a deep faith in society—that motivates us to move forward. In light of this, I feel compelled to end this book by returning to the question that has come up throughout so many chapters, and the same question I'm so often asked by aspiring young entrepreneurs: *Where do you find inspiration for your ideas?* To this, I say there's no formula, but the best place to start is by looking at the people around you³. Think of everyone who inspires you: not just family and friends, but teachers and community members, too. Then move onto your colleagues, mentors and those you're inspired by. What can you learn from these people? How can you

3 Of course there are a multitude of resources, online and offline, that can help find inspiration. A newspaper article may shine light on a new issue you never knew existed, a personal post on social media may trigger emotions that motivate you to research further and find a solution to the problem. In the context of this chapter, I consider relationships as a primary source of inspiration for ideas.

help them? The answers to these questions won't come instantly, but they'll reveal themselves as you thoughtfully build relationships with these people over time. And once you've found your inspiration, choose the partners who will help push you to become the person and entrepreneur you strive to be. Surround yourself with friends and loved ones who will give you a warm hug to help you through the failures and scream with joy at your successes. You're in for an incredible journey.



ADVICE AND INSIGHTS FROM THOUGHT LEADERS AND OTHERS

It is a great privilege to receive contributed advice for this book from industry leaders, mentors, professors, colleagues and friends. Some were included throughout the chapters, and many more are included below.

“When you think it’s the time to hire, it means probably it’s too late. You should’ve started six months ago or 12 months ago.”

Ariel Tseitlin

Partner, Scale Venture Partners

“One great piece of advice I got early on in my tech career is to keep coding for as long as I can—that’s where most value in tech is created.”

Itamar Novick

Chief Business Officer, Life360

“The best advice I can give to an aspiring entrepreneur (or to anyone for that matter), is to maintain everything in perspective. The journey to innovate and create a startup is met with many challenges and obstacles, and many fail simply because they give up. Throughout my personal endeavors and most recently venture fund FusionLA, I discovered that maintaining proportions is incredibly helpful. On one hand, it serves as a reminder of why I began this journey, and the values with which I lead the project. On the other hand, it reminds me

that every challenge is temporary; even if I feel that the world is collapsing around me, perspective grounds me and helps me realize that this will likely pass within an hour (or a day or a year, but it will pass)."

Guy Katsovich

Startup Investor, Founding Partner, Fusion LA

"I would love to have the greatest impact I could in this world and I think you have to be tireless to do that. But I think it's a privilege to get up every day and be motivated to do lots of things."

Alyssa Rapp

CEO, Surgical Solutions

"If you look at a business, you actually don't want to be stabilizing a system. You want to be un-stabilizing a system because you want to grow."

Edison Tse

Stanford Professor, Entrepreneurship Strategy

"Entrepreneurs, at least from where I look at it, they don't have a choice. They cannot take orders. They cannot follow instructions. They can try, and they'll probably be good at it for a while, but something inside will die."

Alon Girmonsky

Co-Founder and CEO, UP9

"There are two things that really drive me to an organization and into a position. One is the subject matter...I really need to connect with the organization's mission. And the second thing is the people, as cliché as that is, but connecting with the people that I'm gonna be working with."

Miri Polachek

CEO, Joy Ventures

“I think the value I gained from the Marine Corps over time was just being very comfortable without knowing what’s coming next, and in every job I’ve had since, it’s just been very valuable to know that through persistence, I can figure it out.”

Jordan Blashek

Director and Head of Talent, Schmidt Futures

“I look at a business career as 30% having the skills and 70% reacting to opportunities.”

Andy Cohen

Senior Vice President of Sales, Bill.com

“You should actually listen to what other people say. One of the best things we did as founders before receiving funding and actually starting to build the team was going to a lot of lectures and gatherings around entrepreneurship.”

Noa Shafir

Co-Founder and CPO, Odo Security

“It’s all about people. Choose wisely who you are working with, thinking with, and dreaming with. Choose them well, and everything that you will do will be a huge success.”

Doron Marco

Co-Founder and CTO, Genie

“In the early days, having a support system, a thought partner to help navigate some of those issues on the product side, I think can be immensely valuable.”

Jake Flomenberg

Partner, Wing Venture Capital

“Most big things in life require teamwork. Always make sure that you have the best people next to you, don’t think that

your skills will overcome others' shortcomings, set yourself in the best position by teaming with the right people."

Yasmin Lukatz

Founder and Executive Director, ICON

"People tend to think too much about their CVs and titles, instead of about what they will learn. In today's job market, who you are as a person and what you know are much more important than another line on your CV. Therefore, you should go to where you will learn the most, which is (usually) the place where you will enjoy yourself the most."

Avinatan Hassidim

Professor, Bar Ilan University; Google Researcher

"Talk to your customers. Why did they buy? Who's the owner of the product? What was the pain they felt? Depending on why they bought your software, there's pain there that you're solving for them, and that's gonna be the target audience."

Meagen Eisenberg

Chief Marketing Officer, TripActions

"Ground yourself. Take your shoes off and walk outside on the ground. Take several deep breaths, and your day will be way better."

David Paluy

CTO, Stride Travel

"I believe that creating positive impact is a mindset that should manifest itself in everything we do as human beings, but mostly as entrepreneurs and investors. When we aim to make a positive impact and can build a product and business aimed to both succeed in the market and by doing so make a positive impact on society, our influence will be the greatest. Being accountable and authentic, we must measure what we do and mitigate potential negative impact. Impact is not a domain or asset class by itself: instead, it is a representation

of values embedded within strong business achievements that consider people and our planet as part of business success. We must think in terms of Risk-Return-Impact.”

Cecile Bliliou

Head of Impact and Sustainability, Pitango Venture Capital

“The best skill you can pick up before embarking on your entrepreneurial journey is sales. Spend a year or two working in tech sales. As a founder, you are always selling—to investors, customers, and employees. You’ll hear a fair share of ‘no,’ so grow that thick skin and hone your sales craft.”

Nicole Priel

Vice President, IBEX Investors

“Diversity in tech really needs to come from the top. We need more LPs that are women. We need more CEOs to be women. We just need more people that have capital and access and the ability to make decisions to start making it for women.”

Adi Levanon Chazan

Principal, Flint Capital

“If you’re not in the game, you can’t win. If you’re in the game and you’re flexible enough to adjust, pivot, and seize the opportunity that crises provide, then you’re ready for the long term and you’ll get there.”

Guy Miasnik

Former Founder and CEO of AtHoc and CSO of BlackBerry

“I invest with a lot of intuition, primarily around how I feel about the people. I love working with bright, open-minded and transparent people because making an investment is going together with the entrepreneurs on an adventure: everything is going to change. The only thing that remains constant is the group that’s working together, and so an investment requires a very intimate relationship. I want the

entrepreneurs to brainstorm with me and tell me that I'm wrong, and feel comfortable doing that!"

Rona Segev

Founding Partner, TLV Partners

"It's important to find a real pain point where there's enough people who share that pain point and where you think you can come up with a very unique offering to solve that pain."

Itai Sadan

Co-Founder and CEO, Duda

"Don't be afraid to seek out as many mentors as you can. It's important to bring other people into the universe who will be doers and who will be thinkers and who are excited about forging ahead."

Ami Mac

Director of Translational Medicine, Stanford Genome Technology Center

"Everything is different, nothing is the same. We can no longer rely on the past to help us create the future. The world is broken and you can fix it. You can rethink, redesign and recreate everything. Change is happening faster than ever. Don't sit by the sidelines and watch it unfold - make it happen. You have everything you need. Don't just sit there, do something. Create the future now."

Nikos Psaltopoulos

Chief Operating Officer, MarineTraffic

"Always think about who your possible clients are, who will actually put a hand in their pocket and pay for your product. Those people or companies are your main focus and you need

to adjust your product, marketing and sales efforts towards them (and only them!).”

Michal Waltner Levi

Global Program Manager, Google for Startups

“Fulfilling your dreams is a long journey, so don’t let short-term difficulties get in the way.”

Jacob Shulman

CFO, JFrog

“Successful people don’t make excuses. My best advice to any young, rising entrepreneur would be to start getting in the habit now of catching yourself when you make an excuse and especially blaming others for anything, whether that be a poor grade, being late to something, or not taking the first steps of a startup. The easy way out is to make excuses about a teacher not liking you and your alarm clock messing up, but successful people remove all the excuses and know that they are ultimately the only ones in control. They can then remove the excuses about not having the resources, idea, time or anything else holding them back from taking the first steps in a startup and venture out on the entrepreneurial journey knowing that they have what it takes.”

Laurie Stach

Founder and President, LaunchX

“Learn the ‘1-10-100’ rule. When you know something is wrong and you don’t address the problem right away—it costs you 1 point. If you continue to look past the problem because it is inconvenient, uncomfortable, untimely, or you think it can still resolve itself—it costs you 10 points. If you then let it fester and it continues to adversely impact your

leadership, the organization, and its values—it costs you 100 points. (Thank you, Roberta Katz.)”

David Arfin

Co-Founder and CEO, NineDot Energy; Former VP Strategy and Customer Financing, SolarCity

“Focus on your core life mission, not your current role or title. Summarize it in a few sentences, write it in your notes, tell it to your friends and family, and optimize your decision-making around this mission (and make it happen!)”

Sharin Fisher

Investor, Fort Ross Ventures

“I learned that what you study in school is very different from the real world. The economy doesn’t operate like that. Markets and companies don’t operate like that. Get your hands dirty, do the groundwork and learn how the macro environment really works.”

Alon Ozer

Chief Investment Officer, Omnia Family Wealth

“We humans have a defense mechanism, meaning that we really like to think that our decisions and our behavior is rational. And the thing is that we cannot begin to imagine the effect of cognitive biases, of environmental cues, and of our emotions on the way we make decisions.”

Liraz Margalit

Behavioral Economics Expert, IDC Herzliya

“Don’t try to solve your own problems. They are not interesting.”

Alon Matas

Founder and President, BetterHelp

“Too many good ideas just fall by the wayside because entrepreneurs haven’t been able to get the right message to the right person. That’s what marketers have to do. They have to find the WIIFM: what’s in it for me.”

Linda Popky

Founder, Leverage2Market

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help. When I started as a young organizer, I thought I had to do all of the work myself but when I was on the frontlines of campaigns, my biggest successes came when I handed leadership over to my team and when I wasn’t the center of attention. Shared leadership will lead to shared success.”

Sam Goldman

Donor Relations and Gifts Officer, Burning Man Project

“I was sure that I was going to be a lawyer, or a judge, and that it was my purpose in life. But then I discovered other amazing things that were a better fit for me. So just be open minded about opportunities and keep learning!”

Shiran Yaroslavsky

Co-Founder and CEO, Cassiopeia Tech

“When you hire people, remember that it’s a two way street. They don’t just agree to work for you, you also agree to work for their career. Communicate the joint responsibility and maintain an open and healthy conversation about their career and their aspirations.”

Etai Beck

Co-Founder and CEO, Folloze

“Do not be afraid of failures. The important things are to have a growth mindset and fall forward.”

Daniella Gutlansky

Product Manager, Alphabet

“I think that I’m a little averse to labels and labeling people in their careers. We have a tendency of thinking of someone based on their job, the last job that they’ve done, or the role they’ve done the most of, and with that we run the risk of shortchanging ourselves.”

Leor Stern

Co-Founder and CEO, Cronologics Corporation (Acquired by Google)

“Don’t spend time crying over your failures, and don’t forget to celebrate your success. Each success, minor as it may be, is worth celebrating. Take the moment to enjoy it, and to say a good word to the people who worked with you, before you move on. This is the fuel that will keep you running.”

Maya Avni

MBA Candidate, Stanford University Graduate School of Business

“To boost productivity, instead of working 8 hours straight, I’d work for 3 hours, take a 2 hours long break to reset my energy, and then work for another 3 hours. Those 6 hours in total produce more results than the 8 hours, and I’m still energized to pursue my hobbies afterwards.”

Dani Arnaout

Tech Speaker and Author

“Very few things are worth being the hill to die on, so don’t ruin professional relationships trying to prove your point.”

Anne Blum

Head of Platform, Angular Ventures

“Founders need to form a connection with the investor. If I’m going to invest, I want to make sure not only that you know what you’re talking about, but I also want to find out who you

are and whether you're the kind of person that I want to work with."

Stav Erez

Partner, Labs/02

"That's been the driving force for me across my whole career: How do I actually innovate and push the envelope or be part of something that pushes it to the next stage and really be able to have a large impact?"

Nir Bar-Lev

Co-Founder and CEO, Allegro AI

"People often struggle from a fear of rejection and an inability to put themselves back out there after having hit a roadblock. It can become a hard pattern to break, so that you end up missing new opportunities over and over again. Good sales people never fear rejection and never take it personally and have the ability to keep putting themselves out there. Instead they approach their sales quota analytically and remind themselves that getting ducks in a row takes more work than simply commanding those ducks to line up. So my advice there would be when you are looking for a salesperson for your small business, find someone with true grit, hustle, and resilience. Those traits matter much more than the fancy resume with bells and whistles."

Fatima Zaidi

Co-Founder and CEO, Quill

"Never give up, learn from anyone you can, take advantage of every opportunity, and make sure to choose activities that you are passionate about. Don't be afraid to ask questions; that's the best way to learn!"

Amit Kochavi

Founder and CEO, Circles

“I think two very important things to keep in mind are (1) finish what you started, even if it’s not perfect; (2) be a professional: choose one thing, dive into it, know what you’re talking about, and become an expert.”

Shiran Elizur

Head of Brand Development, Super-Pharm

“Surround yourself with people who are much smarter than you.”

Daniel Dolev

Former Investment Analyst, Vintage Investment Partners

“Oftentimes, the outcomes of our decisions aren’t necessarily what we expected or thought we wanted. But when we embrace them, these outcomes can lead to different opportunities for learning, success, and happiness beyond what we could have planned for.”

Rebekah Bastian

CEO and Co-Founder, OwnTrail

“Look at the world with an empathetic lens because when you feel for others, you’re able to understand their needs. Approaching the world with empathy will increase your ability to recognize opportunities to make the world a better place.”

David Kadouch

Product Lead, Google

“Even though it’s tempting to bring only your friends, you should think about diversity and having a diverse team from the get-go because it’s very hard to turn around later.”

Efrat Dagan

Global Head of Talent, Next Insurance

“The secret is to have global thinking, to capture opportunity, and have the knowledge and experience to act locally and to deliver globally.”

Lisandro Brill

Latin America Venture Capitalist

“By the year 2050, more than 20% of the population will be 60 and above. That means that every fifth person in the world is going to be an older adult, and this changes our whole society and opens a huge market for opportunity and innovation.”

Yael Benvenisti

CEO, Mediterranean Towers Ventures

“Having AI doesn’t mean you’re building the right product. You can build a very, very interesting AI system which wouldn’t have any product market fit, so what’s your point of investing in it.”

Sergey Gribov

Partner, Flint Capital

“Usually early stage startups don’t really have a product, a product market fit, income, or revenue. So generally, the investment is based on chemistry between the founders and the venture capitalist.”

Shiran Melamndovsky Somech

Program Managing Director, DriveTLV

“Surround yourself with mentors as early as you can. You’ll be surprised how many people will respond to you. Learn from them, and seek to build long-term relationships.”

Sean Sternbach

Co-Founder, Venture Out

“Every single stakeholder has totally different needs. Actually, this is one of the things I love about legal counsel because it really never gets boring.”

Rachel Efrat

Senior Legal Counsel, Lightricks

“You have to know your market. You have to know the ecosystem. You have to know what your competitors are doing. And the role of that strategy function or business development function is to connect all of these inputs and roll them into one coherent strategy and a plan.”

Doron Simon

C-Level Executive, Investor and Advisor

“If you’re young and you don’t have purpose behind what you’re doing, life can become very empty. The earlier you can really identify your purpose and passion and if the work you’re doing is or is not aligning with that, then you can work to fill in that gap.”

Amy Vetter

CEO, The B3 Method Institute

“I always try to grab or hold on to the positive and good things in life. It was very easy for me to be in the hospital and say, ‘Okay, my life is ruined. I’m gonna give up and that’s it.’ But I decided to choose an alternative path: to believe in myself, and to believe that, despite the challenges, things will be OK.”

Omri Krigel

Founder, Homeward Ventures

“Talent looks like everything and there are brilliant people all over the world, so make sure that you have a real talent

mindset, and you appreciate, understand, and care about people and the value and uniqueness they're bringing."

Ginny Clarke

Director of Executive Recruiting, Google

"I like the uncertainty of problem solving. I like the chaos and I like being the first one in a problem or a challenge trying to figure it out."

Kiran Chin

Founder and CEO, MKA Insights

"We don't lose ourselves, find ourselves, or make changes with any one grand decision; it is these millions of little micro decisions that we make over and over which either take us further away from ourselves or bring us closer back to ourselves."

Erika Gerdes

Authenticity Advocate, Speaker; Former Google Business Executive

"The best advice I can give, which regrettably I don't follow myself enough, is to trust your intuition. We're too focused on analyzing everything, and A/B testing every decision—but sometimes our 'hunch' gives us answers faster and more precisely than any analysis we could do. Unfortunately, we've been so programmed to not trust our first instinct that too frequently we don't listen to it or listen to it too late. When you have this 'spark' in the back of your head saying, 'I should do X,' don't suppress it—just go and do X."

David Tabachnikov

CEO, ScholarshipOwl

"There's nothing wrong with running a successful business and serving customers and serving employees well. You don't

need to dress it up with this whole, ‘We’re a mission driven company...’”

Eli Bildner

Co-Executive Director, Rivet School

“Try to focus on industries that make you excited, because your point of view on specific solutions—or even problems—is highly likely to change along the way.”

Omer Davidi

Co-Founder and CEO, BeeHero

“In order to find the product market fit, Israeli entrepreneurs need to hit the market and be here, be present in the US market, as soon as possible.”

Yair Vardi

Co-Founder and Partner, Fusion LA

“When you onboard your employees very well, your retention will be a lot higher, employees stay longer and be more productive, and it will help your overall employer brand.”

Amy Davies

Founder and CEO, First 30 Inc.

“You may have the best idea in the world, but I have never heard of anyone building something big alone. Find the most talented team and invest in people early on.”

Paul Wharshavsky

Investor

“I mentor a lot of young people and a lot of people have the big ten-year vision, but then you ask them, ‘Hey, what are you

going to do on Friday to get there?’ And they’re like, ‘I have no idea.’ So, scaffolding, how you do something, is important.”

Danielle Strachman

Founder and General Partner, 1517 Fund

“Constantly try, and constantly fail. Once you fail repeatedly, you’ll overcome your fear of failure because you’ve experienced the worst that can happen. You’ve been there, and it’s not so bad. And it fuels your desire to keep going at it.”

Yaron Carni

Founder of Maverick Ventures (Israel)

“People who don’t manage their time well struggle as leaders, whether at a Fortune 500 company or at a brand-new startup. Something I learned from a number of great leaders is that the most critical thing you need to think about is, ‘Where am I going to spend my time?’ because that’s the most precious commodity you have.”

Raymond Stern

Technology Executive, Mentor, Investor

“Seek to understand before seeking to be understood. That’s it. It solves everything.”

Dana Look-Arimoto

Founder and CEO, Phoenix⁵

“It always has to start bottom up. You can’t come and kind of impose yourself on people who don’t want to join it. It always has to be someone from that community who says, ‘I want to be leading that growth and bringing more people into that space in my community.’”

Roy Munin

Co-Founder and CEO, Made in Jerusalem

“Find something you care about; find something you are very good at; find something that is needed; find great people you want to work with. If you can find those four things, then work hard, and have the nerve to take risks and the drive to get things done through adversity. That’s 80 percent of what it takes to become a successful entrepreneur. The other 20 percent is luck!”

Sandor Valner

CEO, Network Bankers

“Listen carefully to everyone. Only through attention to others will you learn to listen to your internal voice that expresses your intuition and knowledge.”

Tal Brown

CEO and Co-Founder, Zone7

“Sleep is the ultimate superpower for your future-self. Your productivity, to the way you make decisions to the way you actually run your day, to your happiness, to your love. Everything is kind of affected from your night routine. Whatever you do, don’t ever compromise sleep to meet a deadline at work. Some helpful tips:

1. Don’t take your smartphone to bed. Get a notepad and before you go to sleep write down whatever is on your mind. In the morning, take this list and convert it into working blocks on your calendar.
2. When sun is down, turn down the lights and let Flux take over your laptop to reduce blue light reduction from the screen
3. If possible, utilize a wearable device to discover your sleep patterns and get in-depth insight that encourages better sleep habits.”

Tommy Barav

Founder and CEO, Supertools

“Start before you’re ready.”

Yael Shemer

Co-Founder and CMO, TULU

“Use the fact that you’re young as an excuse to just go ahead and fulfill your entrepreneurship dream exactly as you envision it. If you do it all wrong, you had the best lesson life could give you—and you’ve still got many years to go.”

Yoav Vilner

CEO and Co-Founder, Walnut

“Enjoy doing, and enjoy not doing.”

Yoni Bulkin

Co-Founder and CTO, Spekto

“What you want as a founder is to say, ‘Okay, don’t just tell me what the law is, but tell me practically what’s the smartest way to get from where I am to where you understand I wanna go.’”

Jeff Hyman

Chief Executive Officer, LWD Advisors Inc.

“The first thing that you need to understand is what do I need to stop doing? What am I doing that’s just wasting time and I should not be doing ‘cause even if I do it, it won’t help us grow’?”

Gadi Bashvitz

President and Chief Customer Officer, NeuraLegion

“To scale up, you need three things: great people, great systems, and great feedback models. Greatness is truly achieved by granting freedom to others smarter than yourself. Every

system is built perfectly to get the results it's getting. And, the pain of reflection is how you achieve progress."

Jake Goldman

Founding Engineer, Ophelia Health

"Let go of the life you have planned to accept and embrace the life that is actually waiting for you. There are so many things we don't even know exist, so be open and don't resist."

Amy Bianca Cohen-Dagan

Global Innovation Manager, AB Inbev

"Don't ask yourself what will make you successful. Don't ask yourself what will make you happy. Ask what turns you on. What makes you alive. Do the things that make you forget who you are and where you are, the things that make a day feel like an hour."

Daniel Leviathan

Thought Leader and Entrepreneur

"Find your passion. Be hungry but be humble. It's a journey, and one never arrives, so keep on innovating on the heels of your previous success."

Shmuel Shottan

SVP Storage Engineering, Hitachi Vantara

"What's nice about building startups is that you see the small dents that you're making. They're not necessarily going to be there for years, but you're making this dent and you see it immediately."

Orit Balicer Tsur

Co-Founder, Overall

“I think there’s always been scarcity in terms of good engineers. Good engineers are not growing on trees.”

Gideon Intrater

Chief Technology Officer, Adesto Technologies

“Founding a startup and being an entrepreneur is something that’s extremely difficult. The cycles of success are never linear, and you need to have a lot of resilience and a lot of grit in order to succeed”

Tal Tochner

Principal, PICO Venture Partners

“Look at any task you take upon yourself as if it were the most important one—no matter if it seems small or meaningless. This level of rigor and professionalism will ensure you always execute at the highest of standards.”

Yaron Yaniv

Director, Enterprise Architecture, Silicon Valley Bank

“The thing that I think is most pronounced in my career is what I call this ‘personal board of directors.’ So, it’s a set of people who are my mentors, and much like a board of directors we meet regularly. We’re all vested together in this thing called each other’s success. It’s very much a mutual relationship.”

Michal Segalov

Director of Engineering, Google

“Remember where you came from, take the pieces you like from each part of the world, and create your own world with all the pieces you’ve collected over the years. The rest is just about enjoying life.”

Jorge Myszne

Co-Founder and CEO, Kameleon

“Obviously I’m a big passionate ambassador of the Israeli startup nation and trying to support Israeli companies and founders, but I also want to try to help big corporations understand and acknowledge that they can’t solve everything internally.”

Hadar Pode

Director at Porsche Digital Tel Aviv

“When it comes to product management, success is defined by enabling your team. That could mean anything from unblocking your engineers to aligning your designers with the marketing department to ordering pizza for a late-night working session.”

Ivan Lee

CEO, Datasaur.ai

“I’m really excited about changing things that I don’t really agree with.”

Keren Herskovici

Co-Founder and Managing Director, Woman2Woman

“Joining a startup can be scary. It’s scary because you typically take a pay cut, and take on a lot of uncertainty. You don’t even have a defined role, you just do whatever is needed. But you learn a ton and it’s a blast!”

Ron Diamant

Principal Engineer and Lead Architect, Amazon Web Services

“There is no room for small dreams. It’s not only the message in Shimon Peres’ book, but it’s my motto. When in Pitango we invest in a company, it’s because we believe it can be huge (and as a prerequisite, the founders must believe that as well).

Don't let hard times discourage you and always remember to follow the big dream!"

Sapir Ben Harosh

Associate, Pitango Venture Capital

"When you're building technology, you always have to have a product mindset. You have to understand what's replicable and what's not, what to build, what not to build, and when to say 'No.'"

Raz Abramov

Founder and VP R&D, EverCompliant

"On social media, some of us who are a little more uncomfortable about being online, and if that's you, you've got to take a risk and you've got to be out there. For others, you need to differentiate between the way you show up on other types of social media and on the more professional LinkedIn platform."

Sandra Clark

CEO and Founder of LinkedIn Mentoring

"No one really becomes a fool until they stop asking questions. Curiosity is the first step on the path towards innovation."

Jacob Berman

Investment Banking Analyst, Barclays

"Fall in love with a problem, a challenge. I believe that in order to grow and succeed, you need to learn the basics of everything—from writing code to managing people. Be thirsty for knowledge, ask the hard questions, and love what you do."

Daniel Chernenkov

CTO (Software Engineering Manager)

“Michael Jordan once said, ‘Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen.’”

Ofir Kuberman

CEO, Sendatradie

“Be curious, explore, and try many fields. See which fields excite you the most so that even if you will work days and nights, you still feel motivated to succeed.”

Dan Chaitas

Entrepreneur

“Make sure you present the world with an opportunity, a new approach, and the ability to do something that will make them go ‘Wow!’”

Mickey Haslavsky

CEO, Avian

“One of my favourite quotes is by Walt Disney: ‘If you can dream it, you can do it.’”

Ido Bichler

First Lieutenant, Israeli Defense Forces

“Entrepreneurship is like navigating through stormy water: most of the time, you don’t know where you’re heading or where to turn. Developing an inner compass is a key tool to unlocking your full potential as a true entrepreneur that will help you in times of uncertainty and insecurity along the way.”

Dor Ezra

Chief Executive Officer, Wize

“My advice is to not be afraid to reach out. The worst that could happen is someone doesn’t respond. But generally people, especially successful entrepreneurs, remember what it’s like to start out, so they are usually very helpful and supportive to someone who reaches out. I think it’s a great way

to make connections and a lot of how we got our sponsors for HackGenY was through reaching out on platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Gmail, etc!”

Waverly Harden

Assistant Staff Engineer, MIT Lincoln Laboratory

“Make it your mission to always be learning. Listen to everyone’s input, even if you don’t think they’ll have something smart to say.”

Omri Itzhaki

COO, 8200 Innovation Forum

“Think about how you can design your business with automation machines that will complement your lifestyle, especially when it’s your most beautiful years. Many times repetitive actions can be automated with tools, virtual assistants and freelancers, and today’s tech automation capabilities are becoming more powerful and user-friendly.”

Yuval Malichi

Buys and flips online businesses

“Always assume that the solution is around the corner. Be optimistic that you will solve any problem that is in your way; whether it is finding a business idea, a customer, or a co-founder—keep your eyes and ears searching. Entrepreneurs need to be optimistic.”

Roy Nicolet

Stanford Graduate School of Business, Entrepreneur

“Don’t think about what you want to do now; think about where you want to be in the future. Do what you have to do today so you’ll be the person you want to be tomorrow.”

Roni Gorodetsky

Founder, STEMinds

“If you build collaborative relationships with smart, good, and capable people, they will lift you up and allow you to succeed in your own ambitions. Choose your group wisely, and shower them with kindness and support.”

Zachary Bamberger

Machine Learning Software Engineer, Google

“To create a fruitful ecosystem or to create a really meaningful community, you need to provide value not only to the members, but also to people that are trying to see how they can partner with the community.”

Mor Eini

Strategic Partnerships and Growth, APX

“We stop playing when our fear is greater than our curiosity.”

Haim Shafir

Inventor of TAKI (board game), and 100+ other games

“In this journey, you have to learn to handle failure. In the first one to two tries, failing will demotivate you, but it will also build your resilience and teach you to be nonchalant about failure. This is really the toughest hurdle, and once you get over it, nothing can stop you.”

Elhanan Ballas

Bootstrap Entrepreneur

“As an entrepreneur, you will have hundreds of good and bad ideas. Remember that any idea, even if it looks unrealistic, ridiculous, or already worn out, has a kernel of innovation. Make sure you look for this kernel before you throw it away.”

Koby Mike

PhD Student, Technion

“My best advice is what Michael told me in an interview at age 19: ‘Your environment is what makes you what you are.’

Surround yourself with motivated people who care about you, and you'll succeed."

Abigail Klein Leichman

Associate Editor, ISRAEL21c.org, specializing in journalism about Israeli innovation

"I see most consumer products in the future being net positive and significantly reducing harm for our mental health, and that's a very different future from the world that we live in today and one that I'm quite excited about."

Dan Seider

Founder, Misu

"I was watching other people experience the art in real time and there's something really lovely about a shared experience."

Katrina Yaukey

Broadway Actress and Musician

"Many early-stage entrepreneurs are hesitant to involve the press and media because they have yet to raise a substantial amount of capital or completed developing the product. These same entrepreneurs are giving up an opportunity to work alongside the media throughout their journey. By avoiding the media, they may miss on expanding their reach to many others that are unaware of the company and potential strategic partnerships."

Ofir Auslander

High-Tech Public Relations Manager

"Carry on! Your energy and intellectual curiosity will take you far. Your kindness and positive attitude will always ensure that, wherever you are, people are there to surround you."

Marian Sofaer

General Counsel, Federal Arbitration, Inc.

“If asked, I would tell both young and experienced entrepreneurs on their journey:

Wonder, explore. Investigate and pursue your dreams!

Never give up!

Be modest, be generous, be kind, don't be judgemental!

Be humble!

It can be a difficult journey and keeping these words in mind might make it a bit easier, more enjoyable, successful and more meaningful.”

Shane Spring

Investor

“General advice is always ‘right’ because it worked for the person giving it. But every example can be countered with another person who did the opposite and still found success. At some point, it becomes time to own your intuition and follow your own path. If you're trying to do something unique, there's no one else who can show you the way.”

Ben Latz

Software Business Owner

“These days, I feel like anyone can be a journalist. You need the basic tools and obviously some experience, audiences need to know you are trustworthy and that you are reporting with integrity in order to shed light on the facts, but with the platforms that exist today it's relatively easy for an individual to reach everyone at any time. It's an amazing opportunity to spread stories and get through to so many people so very quickly.”

Shachar Peled

Europe Correspondent, Channel 13 News

“Local government is where you can make the most difference in your immediate community and your daily life. Meet with your council members, your mayor, and your representatives.

They want to hear from you, and those relationships can be critical as you try to get things accomplished, seek advice, and strive to make the world a better place.”

Larry Klein

Mayor of Sunnyvale, California

“Don’t listen to people telling you it’s impossible. Follow your inner light and don’t let fear affect your judgment.”

Sapir Caduri

Software Engineer, Google

“Be ready to learn and embrace every experience, and always keep your head up high!”

Michal

Israel Defense Forces

“Always aim to have more memories than dreams. Make all your dreams into memories.”

Lior Zagury

Google EMEA

“Many times, the source of the problems we are trying to solve hides behind human interests. Deeply understanding humanity is sometimes even more important than having technological proficiency.”

Matan Snir

Founder and CTO, Loophole Games

“Remember that everyone has a different motivation. If you can understand a person’s motives and help him fulfill them, that person will help you overcome any obstacle, especially when things get tough.”

Yaniv Goldstein

Fullstack Software Engineer, Hippo Insurance

“Always be on alert for the ways your experiences and past accomplishments may have inadvertently caused you to develop cognitive blind spots that bias your perspective, your communication style, and the actions you take—much more than you realize.”

Stuart Friedman

Executive Coach, Stu Friedman Associates

“Start building with the tools that let you move fast and adjust to changes. Once you know about your market fit, you will need to trade the flexible prototype for the product you know people can rely on.”

Michael Kris

Senior Software Engineer, Tangent Logic

“The greatest critic of what you’ve done in your life will be the future you. Be thoughtful in your choices, and make a memory of that thoughtfulness so your future self will remember, understand, and accept.”

Rainey Booth

Founding Partner, Littlepage, Booth, Leckman

“Dare to do something. Experience is the winning path!”

Elad Wasserstein

Machine Learning Consultant

“A small detail can make a big difference, but don’t forget about the bigger picture.”

Gilad Sellam

Senior Software Developer, Fabric

“FACE YOUR FEARS! It’s not easy to overcome your fears, but you must overcome them to be able to move forward

with your dreams. Fearlessness is like a muscle: The more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes.”

Dima Vishnevetsky

Front End Expert and Consultant

“Effective leadership shouldn’t be taken for granted. It all depends on your passion and attitude, expertise, authority, and sometimes, pure friendship and respect. It takes emotional intelligence to know which side of yourself to employ at what moment. And if there’s ever a moment in which you don’t know how to move forward, seek the opinions of others. Not only will you discover new perspectives to consider, but you’ll energize those around you to help you out.”

Eyal Skop

Lead Data Engineer, Salesforce

“My biggest advice to a 15-year-old is do what makes you happy, follow your dreams, and believe in what you are doing. But don’t forget to challenge your mind in your next big adventure!”

Itay Shmuelly

R&D Manager

“Keep enjoying your amazing, inspiring journey to greatness!”

Uri First

Senior Software Engineer, Google

“You’ll be better off using failures for growth rather than trying to avoid them entirely. Acknowledge your weaknesses, and evolve through painful errors. If being an entrepreneur were easy and pain-free, we would all be founders of a unicorn startup.”

Jonathan Schory

Product Integration Engineer, Bridgewater Associates

“Learn to sell and learn to build.”

Javier Alaves

Product Designer, Tribe Platform

“Have ethics and integrity. Always do the best you can. Value your name, love your family, and have hope for the future.”

Steven Gerbsman

Managing Partner, Gerbsman Partners

“Live your life with the exuberant willingness to experience anything, and then share it!”

Derek Maingot

PreSales North America, BiZZdesign

“For any big ‘move’ you want to make, make it in a supportive environment that will push you towards it.”

Daniel Elishayev

Software Engineer, Safebreach

“If you’re going to do one thing every day, let it be getting outside of your comfort zone.”

Nick van Breda

Country General Manager, Campus Party the Netherlands

“Your heroes and role models are much more accessible than you might believe them to be! You just need to grab their attention with a captivating, interesting, or powerful message. An email filled with power and intention goes a long way.”

Gabriela Lipson

*Chief Communications and Strategic Planning Executive
Officer, Project Nightfall*

“While you seek out wisdom gleaned from others’ experiences, resist the temptation to find ‘answers’ from any advisor. Also, no matter how dazzling your technology, how inspiring

your vision, or how talented your team, above all, you should be able to easily convey how you bring value to real-life customers in specific ways your competitors can't."

Pete Sickle

Senior Director of Content and Business Development, DEEP.
it

"Teenagers often feel like they are clueless, and that everyone else in the world, and especially their peers, know what they are doing. It's not true. We are all on a lifelong journey to try and figure things out. Be ready to make mistakes, and ask questions even if you are worried you might look foolish (you won't). You can do it. Believe in yourself."

Aviva Rosensweig

Educator, WBAIS

"I believe it's always great to follow your passion and listen to what your heart tells you. Develop a vision, but also lead with compassion and empathy for those working with you in your endeavors and for those less fortunate than you."

Edie Weitzman

11/12th Grade and College Counselor, WBAIS

"As we begin to enter the world of post-capitalism—that is, a world with a greater focus on human welfare than on profit—always keep the larger social impact of what you're doing in mind. Sooner or later, that will be what counts."

Neal Jacover

Head of School, WBAIS

"As I get older I realize the importance of stopping, breathing, and being still for a good amount of time. Many of the answers we are looking for are right in front of our eyes but

we are just too busy to notice them or have time to believe in them.”

Jonathan Minke

Band Teacher, WBAIS

“In real life, one of our biggest social fears is failure. That’s why I find joy in providing my drama students the safe space to try. Try it all. If it’s a failure - enjoy it, learn from it and make sure that when it happens, fail fabulously.”

Liran Yaacobi

Drama Teacher, WBAIS

“We have two mottos we keep telling our athletes here: ‘Everyone is an athlete’ and ‘Never give up.’ In the real world, we obviously realize not everyone is an athlete. But everyone can capture opportunities, try to be the best version of themselves, learn to work hard, be part of a team, and demonstrate commitment and perseverance in the things they do. So, once you choose to be an ‘athlete’ in whatever path you choose, you need to remember to never give up.”

Doron Kramer

Israel Athletic Director, WBAIS

“Only someone who tries something new knows what he’s capable of.”

Nicole Chernick

Educator, WBAIS

“When faced with choices, try selecting experiences that will be unlike anything you have done before or will do afterwards. No matter what path you choose, go all in. Commit to any task you undertake with the knowledge that you are

young and there is plenty of time to change your mind, try new things, and adjust your path along the way if necessary.”

Lee Alpert

Stanford Student

“Follow your passion, and don’t let others dictate your life for you. Your passion, combined with perseverance and dedication, will drive you to your success.”

Jonathan Ronson Pearl

Real Estate Sales and Marketing Manager

“Focus on the few decisions that will have a massive impact rather than the many decisions that slowly but surely grow your impact over time.”

Nir Kabessa

CEO and Co-Founder, Yup; President, Blockchain at Columbia

“Look for constructive criticism at every step of the way: It will sharpen your perspective and further align your goals.”

Tali Flomenhoft

Associate Director of Parent and Family Giving, Brandeis University

“In today’s world, where there is a plethora of information thrown at us from every direction, it’s really easy to lose track of what’s important to you. The best advice I could give to a young entrepreneur would be to set a goal for yourself, and do everything you can to achieve it. In order to achieve that goal, make sure it’s something that you care and are passionate about.”

Maya Perry

Client Success Manager, McCann Tech

“Always learn new things. If you’re in a place where you’re only doing things you know, you’re not advancing.”

Melanie Assous

Software Developer

“Before you can change the world, you need to understand it. Develop a hunger for curiosity and a thirst for discovery. Read voraciously, observe independently, and explore your surroundings through the lens of various disciplines.”

Koren Gilbai

Security Analyst, IDF Cyber Defense Division

“I still stand by the same old quote: ‘Dreams don’t work unless you do’ —John C. Maxwell. There’s no secret—dream big, believe in yourself, go the extra mile, and stay kind.”

Lear Gilbai

Fifth-Year Medical Student

“Be authentic, really dig down and understand what your values are and anything you do from that point must align with those values. Coherency is the best strategy.”

Lea Chocron

Studying Masters in Management, HEC Paris

“Stay true to yourself, follow your dreams, and don’t turn your back on those who love you.”

Rodrigo Alfaro Garcia

Actor

“My advice is very simple, almost clichéd: never stop believing in yourself. The people around you will try to hold you back, maybe to protect you from falling—but in my experience, every failing will lead you, in the long run, to the right

place for you. So, hold on to your dream; you will get there in the end, one way or another.”

Yael Peleg

Law Student, Tel Aviv University

“Always remember to listen to and form connections with people around you at all levels, from those who inspire you immediately to people whose worlds are unimaginably different from yours. You can learn so much from both.”

Ryan Cohen

Business Analyst, McKinsey & Co., San Francisco

“Innovating and creating new products doesn’t require the use of the most advanced tech, per se. It just requires you to work with what you have. I started learning programming at 15 without a mobile phone, a laptop, or access to reliable internet—but I had a programming book and paper readily available. I learned to program in C by writing code on a piece of paper and cross-checking against answers in the book. I only got to actually test out my code several months later, when I saved up to get a mini laptop. Two years later, I had the necessary skills to help me develop websites for clients or even launch my own products.”

Atem Aguer

Student, Stanford University

“Optimize for the people you work with and how you work with them. Ultimately, teamwork will be more important than what you work on.”

Santiago Hernandez

Computer Science Student, Stanford University; Co-Founder, Quarkma

“Don’t just lean on one way of doing something—try out many different ideas and options because you never know which will be the one that sticks.”

Paloma Aisenberg

*Student at Department of Theater and Performance Studies,
Stanford University*

“Have faith in your ability to connect with others and to meet their needs. This will help you innovate in the most relevant and successful way.”

Leeya Fryder

Jewish Agency Israel Fellow, Hillel at Stanford

“Be kind and keep in touch with the people you cross paths with. Chances are you’ll be able to help them find a great employee, discuss a new idea, or work through a challenge. They’ll be happy to return a favor one day (רמחל חלש).”

Nathalie Landesman

Program Director, Partnerships, Global Jewish Peoplehood

“Chase opportunities to be a giver.”

Rabbi Joey Felsen

Executive Director, Jewish Study Network

“Listen wholeheartedly to everyone (including yourself) and everything.”

Dan Roth

Clinical Psychologist

“A mentor of mine would offer the advice: ‘Find your tribe.’ To me, this means surrounding yourself with kind people,

people you can learn from, grow alongside, and be vulnerable with.”

Yonatan Oren

Computer Science Student, Stanford University

“Work the hardest to be your best self, and create enough opportunities for luck to do its magic.”

Vlad Shumlin

Entrepreneur

“Diligently prepare, jump, and keep building your wings as you fly.”

Bianca Rogoff

Multi-hyphenated actress and interdisciplinary artist

“Don’t neglect the importance of work-life-balance. Your long-term professional success (and more importantly, happiness) is dependent on your ability to maintain a healthy inner life and strong relationships. Life is a marathon, not a sprint. So treat it as such.”

Mali Alcobi

Author, Superheroes and Hormones

“Take complete ownership over your actions. That way, whenever something goes wrong, it’s no one else’s problem but your own. Once you do this, you’ll be surprised at how much more quickly you solve things, allowing you to achieve your goals with greater ease.”

Saar Litmanovich

Former 8200 Intelligence Unit Software Development Team Leader; Real Estate Entrepreneur

“As a leader, I try first to listen, then make a point. Better to start with what’s in it for others.”

Uri Nisani

VP Engineering, Kayhut

“Always think of ‘Plan B’ as early as possible. Things tend to go sideways more often than you’d expect them to, so it’s good to be ready.”

Shir Rajuan

Student, Tel Aviv University

“Surround yourself with an honest environment that helps you grow and doesn’t pull you down.”

Shaked Tzipori

Biochemistry Student, Technion

“Your personal skills are important, but sometimes having the next great idea isn’t enough, and you cannot depend solely on luck. So, keep your final destination in mind, and choose the opportunities that will help you gain the experience to get there. In short, do your best to make sure that luck will come to you.”

Tom Bahar

Group Product Manager, IDF
