

Reflections on the Mayfield Fellows Program December 2007

Entrepreneurship:

I've realized that entrepreneurship isn't simply about starting new companies; it's a state-of-mind with which you live your life, constantly striving to find solutions to big problems.

I have a much better understanding of all the different pieces of the startup puzzle. I now understand that there are not only many pieces but that they have to be put together in just the right way.

I realize that all companies, no matter how tranquil and in-control they appear from the outside, are constantly dealing with huge challenges.

I now know that the key to building a successful business is execution. This is a drastic change from the days when I believed that the key to a successful startup was having an amazing idea.

One point of reflection is how unique the Silicon Valley brand of entrepreneurship is. There is so much about the Valley ecosystem that cannot be replicated.

Nine months ago I viewed entrepreneurship as an attitude about opportunities. But now I can add to that the fact that entrepreneurship is about a long, dedicated, focused process of innovation, feedback, iteration, and execution.

I now realize that the entrepreneurial community is incredibly diverse and motivated by an array of passions-for products, market opportunities, solving a problem, contributing to a better world, changing people's lives, building a great company etc-- and also extremely well connected with one another.

I have begun to appreciate how risk-averse entrepreneurs really are and how much time and effort they spend mitigating risks.

Entrepreneurship is getting beyond the daily clutter, asking what really matters, and then diving in headfirst.

I feel very strongly that entrepreneurship will be the main driver of solutions to the current and next wave of the world's problems.

Personal/Career:

I've come to think that wherever you are, to a large extent you're in charge of how much you want to contribute to the company's vision and direction.

I have learned over the past 11 months that I will likely forever be more dedicated to the product side of any business. What is important to me is the product being built, and more critically the customer satisfaction with it. I want to create a perfect product, no matter how impossible this may be.

I know that I'd like to start my own business someday, and sometimes there can be pressure to do it soon... There is time. I want to take time to pursue the opportunities where I can learn the most.

I believe that everyone gets a few really outstanding opportunities in life. My job will be to recognize and have the courage to seize them.

I don't have to sit around with my friends hatching a new business plan to be an Entrepreneur with a capital E. It's great if a company is born that way, but it's also great to just do what you love and love what you do.

I am more seriously considering a career in the startup world. At the time I wrote my essay, I was interested in entrepreneurship, but still averse to working at a startup right out of school. But now, after experiencing 10 different startups through MFP, I feel that there is a place in the startup world for me.

Jeff Miller said, "We may not be right, but we are not confused." The most important thing for me now is to set a course, and move on it. It doesn't matter if I don't have all the answers. I can always change course later on.

One of the most important lessons I received was to always talk about what you're passionate about no matter who you're talking to. By talking about your ideas, not only does one get immense feedback but also unforeseen opportunities.

While some entrepreneurs have been wholly dedicated to start-ups throughout their careers, many have tried different roles and different

jobs at large companies and have successfully transitioned back into a more entrepreneurial environment at a later point in their career.

There is a lot I have to learn about the sales frame-of-mind, especially since I'm a horribly impatient person, but the variety of contexts in which the program has discussed sales and its relevance, has created a gnawing desire to improve this skill.

Over the last nine months I've developed a much more realistic picture of what it means to be an entrepreneur, and how difficult it is to make change happen. And the good news, is that my vision of an entrepreneurial life is still just as attractive, and now even more rooted in realism.

Although it has the same outward appearance, the quality of my confidence has changed dramatically through these nine months. My former "confidence" was more like being "headstrong." I'm now confident through a tri-woven braid of knowledge, experience, and reflection.

Through MFP I met entrepreneurs who were like me. They were out to do something awesome. They wanted to change the world and build incredible things. That's what I want to do.

I have now been exposed to the variety of roles I can play in an entrepreneurial environment, and I am hungry to learn more about where I can best contribute.

Next, while I've gained a substantial appreciation for the many non-technical challenges of starting and running a company, my summer experience helped reaffirm my passion for engineering.

I continue to think that entrepreneurship is the coolest thing that one could dive into, and I still want to pursue hands-on, getting-my-hands-and-yes-even-my-outfit-dirty work.

I try now to plan my actions not around what SHOULD be done in the ideal case, but what CAN be done in the practical one.

At the end of it all, what is my attitude toward the Valley? I don't see why I'd want to be anywhere else. Or doing anything else.