

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/deciding-to-become-a-founder>

Qasar Younis, CEO of Applied Intuition, shares his entrepreneurial journey and how it has helped him discover revelations about himself and why he is drawn to being a founder. He encourages entrepreneurs to figure out their own motivations and identity.



Transcript

- We'd be remiss not to talk about automotive AI, 00:00:04,440 and so I wanna talk about Applied and the markets that you're in.. You're seven years into now Applied.. - Yeah.. 00:00:10,170 - I don't know if that's gone by quickly or slowly, 00:00:12,750 but I'm curious right now, just if you had to give yourself a rating on a scale of zero to 10 in terms of where you're at versus where you envisioned when you started the company, how have you, 10 has exceeded your expectations, five is met expectations.. - Yeah, my expectations were the company was gonna fail, 00:00:29,370 so exceeded my expectations.. I mean, it's a profitable company, which is, you know, does, you know, hundreds of millions in revenue.. I mean, that's just hard to do, and I'm very fortunate that the company that I started is in that group.. - Do you really honestly say, did you really? 00:00:42,503 - No, really.. 00:00:43,783 - You really started a company with the expectation- 00:00:44,616 - Yes.. 00:00:54,000 like all the YC people are great, Paul Graham, amazing people, and leaving, I'll leave the VC's names out of it, but there are people like John Doerr, Marc Andreessen, I mean, the luminary, the true, not just your average VC, I mean the tip of the top, and I asked these people, "Should I do a company?" And they said, "Hell no, that's so stupid.."

You can write any, you can get any job anywhere in the Bay Area doing anything you want.. You have this product background, you have this venture background.. You're still young enough to go run a firm." You know, like a lot of times, there's firm succession questions like venture funds need people to run them.. And the fundamental reality is it was never gonna be Andreessen, Horowitz, Eunice.. It's never gonna be Kleiner Perkins, Eunice.. And in my heart of hearts, I grew up poor, and so I always thought that I did this company thing to not be poor, 'cause I'm cynical, like and there's some part of my brain which is deep, you know, it's that radical pragmatism like why would you- - Had you made enough money 00:01:53,380 at that point where you could retire if you didn't want? - Yeah.. 00:02:05,730 "Oh, actually, this is the thing that I wanna do," and even boiling down to why do I personally wanna start a company? It's because I have strong opinions and I hate mediocrity, and I hate working with people who are just okay with a B+ job, and by the way, there's a cost to that.. There's a personal emotional cost to it.. You work a lot, and it's satisfying to do things at a high level, but it ain't free.. It takes a lot of cost, and so I think for me, it was just making that decision of like am I willing to pay that cost? And to me, yeah, like I don't do anything else..

This is all I do, you know? That's another thing I think you talk about, you know, the question you asked like what's not founder? It was not often talked about founders, like being obsessive to some degree is, I think, a requirement.. - I just wanna

make sure we didn't lose that gem, 00:02:50,483 because so you made this decision.. You had enough money where you didn't need to work a day again in your life.. You had ample opportunity to do whatever you wanted to, and the decision to do this wasn't because you even expected the company to succeed.. It was because you loved so much the idea of performing at a high level.. - Well, there's insecurity, 00:03:05,790 there's a fundamental insecurity there.. At YC, if you're giving advice to people, and my first company failed, and like other company wasn't even a year old when Google bought it.. There's a certain level of insecurity which says, "Why am I giving Tony at DoorDash advice?" Interviewer Yeah.. 00:03:19,550 - Like doesn't make sense, and it's great I talked 00:03:22,028 to Sid from GitLab, a company's first investor and it went public, right? What right do I have to give Sid advice on organizational development? And I remember saying this to other YC partners, and they said, "It's okay.. That's just the name of the game.."

We're looking at patterns," and I think it's true.. I don't think you have to build a huge public company in order to give advice on it.. But there was some insecurity in me, and also I think it took me 20 years.. I feel like I'm pretty self-aware about my motivations, but it still took me 20 years to really realize that fundamentally I don't see myself as an engineer, as a business person, as a VC.. I see myself as a founder, and so you have to figure out what's your own identity, and the unfortunate reality is when you're in this environment, your peers heavily influence you, so you think you might wanna be a founder, but it's actually not your calling, and you might waste 10 or 15 or 20 years discovering that actually that's not the thing you wanna do.. - What is that hidden insight, just in case it's not clear 00:04:20,460 about what makes you a founder versus the other roles? How do you know if you- - For me, I don't know what it's for everybody else, 00:04:28,310 but for me it was I just can't deal with other people's bad ideas.. (laughs) Like I hate to say that.. - Tolerance of mediocrity.. 00:04:34,740 - Yeah, it sounds so arrogant, 00:04:36,300 and I assure you in my own brain, I don't think like I'm some, you know, I have all the answers, but when I do have specific viewpoints on product development, on whatever the thing might be.. You know, at places like Google, you get along to get along..

It's a giant organization.. You know, part of it is like shaking hands and being agreeable, and in this job I don't have to be agreeable, which is like such a wonderful thing.. - It's priceless, that's it.. 00:05:04,800 like this company will like fail, and like it will age very poorly.. The company's doing well now, and so it's like, "Yeah, I was right," you know? (laughing) Like those ideas were not completely wrong, and there's like something deeply satisfying about that.. And I would say one, sorry, I know these are rambling answers.. Also it's hard, it's really hard.. So there's a parallel universe that I go into art.. Like I really like the like photography and the kind of fine arts, and I think in my mind I thought that's not hard enough.. The way that I rationalize it is I'm poor, I can't be an artist, I need to go into engineering 'cause that's the right thing, but I think there was another nugget below in that psychology subconscious, which is like this is hard..

Like this is the ultimate, like even if you're successful, even if a multi-billion dollar company, we're in the Nvidia Auditorium, like there's like the bars are so high that you can spend your entire life in this endeavor and never reach the top.. Even in mountaineering, in lots of other fields, actually getting there is plausible.. In business, I think, or starting companies, starting technology companies specifically, there's maybe no limit, and I like that.. - And you like that?..