

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/experience-matters>

Qasar Younis, CEO of Applied Intuition, observes that experience is an important component of becoming a successful founder. He encourages aspiring founders to spend time learning important business functions before starting a company, but not to wait until the momentum of life takes over.



Transcript

- Sometimes the people who are bad employees 00:00:04,890 are good founders.. So that's also kind of a weird thing, right? - So then how do you know? 00:00:08,940 Because I think, you know, I think many of the students here are gonna wrestle with, one, do they join a Google or a big startup like Applied, or start their own companies? And they're all, I think, wrestling with that to a certain degree.. How do you actually know? Is it something which you just have to be a certain age, you have to be old enough to be wise, but still young enough to be dangerous? Or are there certain skills that you can self-assess when you're ready to actually join and be a CEO of a startup? - Yeah, so I was at Stanford a long time ago, 00:00:41,700 as in two days ago in the auditorium talking to some founders, and I'll use the same framework that I think has helped me understand career decisions, which is all your career decisions fall on a spectrum, or all jobs, I should say, fall on spectrum.. One end of the spectrum is being a founder, on the other end of the spectrum is joining an institution like Google, joining a venture capital fund, joining McKinsey, Goldman, whatever that thing is.. And so you, as somebody who has to make a decision, you're coming out, you can go to grad school or not, that's slightly different.. But now I'd say you're gonna go into the working world.. The closer you get to this end of the spectrum, you will learn things that are more relevant to being a founder.. The further other end, the things you'll learn to be an employee.. And so well that's okay.. So what are the trade-offs here on each end? On the institutional end, you go to work at Google, the things you will learn, you will actually become a software engineer..

Believe it or not, when you graduate, you are not a software engineer.. You have not written software and deployed it in production and dealt with the reality of a product, and software specifically.. It's like a living organism, and how do you manage and curate, especially at scale.. Google Maps is an incredibly complex product.. So you learn, you literally learn, and you have this misnomer, because you come out of a Stanford that you actually know what you're talking about, you don't, and that is something that you see a lot in the Valley, there's a deep arrogance.. You don't know much, that's just the reality of the situation.. I'm not saying you can't learn, that's the process of life.. But when you join in, so what's the downside of joining a Google, or Goldman, or McKinsey, or whatever, is you are the cog in the system and you pay through frustration.. Your manager's generally incompetent, they don't see your genius.. You went to Stanford and they went to some random place or they've been at this company for 15 years..

"How dare, that's so dumb, why would they do that? They must not have been ambitious." And so there's this frustration

that builds up that maybe your talent isn't being correctly tapped or you're not learning enough, or you're on the wrong project, you're in the wrong team, you're at the wrong company, whatever it is, it's frustration.. On the farther end, you decide you know what? "I'm not gonna do the Goldman, I'm not gonna do McKinsey, I'm not gonna do Google, I'm gonna go start my own company." So how do you pay for it that way? Well, you pay for it through fear.. Because once you go out, you get out to that wide ocean.. Suddenly this whole life that you've had this brand train, that's this term that I think, you know, we talked about at YC all the time, and it really sticks in my head is a lot of folks, especially in this room, are on that brand train.. You go to top tier high school, you know, Andover, whatever, TJ, you get into Stanford, afterwards, maybe you go to Harvard, or wherever, for grad school, and then you go to Google, and then what's the next brand? YC or starting a company, that's just the next brand.. And so, you know, the reality is once you actually jump off the train, this brand train, starting a company is actually not linear at all, and you're just out in the ocean, and that's difficult, and it's scary, and that's fear.. - And can you build that skillset 00:03:49,770 by doing a bunch of functional roles? Or is it something more meta, like building resilience, and learning how to throw yourself into uncertainty? - I don't think you can build, I mean, 00:03:59,281 it's one of those things.. - You don't think 00:04:00,114 you can build resilience.. - Yeah, that's really tough.. 00:04:01,020 It's a really tough thing..

I mean, this is like a controversial, you know, strong opinion held example where it's like, I think people who go through, everyone is marginalized to some degree, every single person, even the most privileged person has, it's not that, how do those people then relate to setbacks? So sometimes people who actually grow up in very adverse conditions don't actually deal with setbacks very well either.. So it's not black and white.. So I think the resilience point is that's kind of set through many, many years.. But to be very clear, just answer your question, can you just do a bunch of functions and learn? Yes, you're gonna have a better likelihood of being successful as an entrepreneur if you've done a number of functions...