

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/prep-yourself-for-the-last-mile>

Nebia co-founder, CTO and COO Gabriel Parisi-Amon, compares the prepping of a career as a founder to running a marathon. By pacing yourself as your startup grows, you'll be prepared to take on the challenges of later stages. Taking breaks to go on walks during your day and taking vacations as a way to decompress helps to clear the mind and allows for opportunities to reflect.



Transcript

- As I mentioned, I had taken very little vacation at Nebia and it was actually even worse before.. I left Apple having used one vacation or sick day in my entire tenure.. Lack of unplugging was a key factor in my decent to burnout.. That Christmas vacation where I worked every day, and was a terrible son, brother, and boyfriend.. I ended up returning just as frustrated, empty, and destroyed as ever.. It was the worst of all worlds.. People describe a startup as a marathon, not a sprint.. And I completely agree.. When you run a marathon, you take water at mile three, even though you're not thirsty.. You don't take water at mile three so you can run mile four super fast..

You take it so you can survive and thrive at mile 23, when your legs are shaky, and your knee hurts, and your brain is screaming stop.. At a startup, you take a three-day weekend in month five, not so you can perform in month six.. You take it so at month 18 or month 36, when your funding is running short, your product is delayed, and you just lost a key employee, you can sit down clear-headed, form an action plan, and go execute.. By this point, without vacations or time to reflect, I'd become a pretty miserable coworker, friend, and significant other.. While I barely held it together with my team, I lashed out at my co-founders whenever I thought they did something wrong.. Instead of trying to understand a problem and troubleshoot, I'd get angry and launch blame.. My friends had to listen to endless complaints about vendors, engineering challenges, and everything else that was eating me up.. In March of 2017, two months after we started shipping Nebias, two months after everything was supposed to be fixed, I finally took a vacation.. I took ten days, went away, spent a little time alone.. I read, slept, exercised, but above all I reflected..

I spent time with myself, the part of me that was unhappy, the part of me that was broken.. It was a turning point, I realized I had to do something.. I finally started to brainstorm what.. Still took six months from there for me to take a leave of absence.. How do you avoid getting to where I did? You get to know yourself.. Knowing yourself means understanding the behaviors and emotions that are going through you right now.. Unlike values, which you set and rarely change, these are ever-changing, and understanding them is key to responding to them instead of just reacting.. This is probably the most important thing you can do to stop yourself from sliding down a slippery slope of burnout.. My recommendation and what I wish I did was find out where and how to best listen to your deepest thoughts, the thoughts that get hidden by the urgency of work, social life, bills, and everything else that always takes precedence.. I want to be clear, these are not the voices in your head that beat you up with doubts, or obsess on conversations of the past or problems in the future..

This is past that, this is the part of you that truly understands how you are feeling and what you want.. If you don't carve out time to reflect and connect with this side of you, you will start to make rudderless decisions.. And no matter how hard you work, you will not end up where you are trying to go.. People do different things to listen to themselves, run, meditate, pray, hike, the list goes on.. I can't tell you what to do or what will work for you.. You need to find that for yourself.. But find out what combination of activities on a weekly or daily basis allow you to listen to yourself..