

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-spectrum-of-careers>

Qasar Younis, CEO of Applied Intuition, shares advice for college students who are aspiring founders and are deciding which direction to take their career. By becoming an employee at a large institution, you learn practical skills but are a cog in the system. By starting a company right away, you learn about being a founder but face fear and uncertainty.



Transcript

- So for the aspiring founders, 00:00:04,560 can we talk about the salient misconceptions of starting a company? What's the reality versus the myth? - Yeah, the first thing is I've done a lot of things 00:00:15,090 because if it's not obvious, I'm old.. So that is an important point.. So I think probably one of the first misconceptions is related to that, experience matters.. I think there is certainly, at YC, you evangelize this view that anybody can do entrepreneurship at any point with just enough ambition, and that is not true.. And the example that I would use here is you guys know this like weird stat that if you are over seven feet tall in the US, there's a 17% chance you'll be in the NBA.. So roughly one out of, so you hit seven feet, one outta five chance, you're gonna be a millionaire throwing a leather ball through a hoop for entertainment purposes, and that's like kind of mind boggling, right? But if you asked me, "Hey Qasar, who here is gonna be an NBA player?" And I would say, "Anyone who's six foot five stand up, 'cause you have a better shot." The same thing exists with entrepreneurship, but it's just not obvious, it's not this physical indicator of who's actually well formed for that specific task.. And so the first thing is the way that you, but unlike being tall, you can actually get better, so experience is a really important component there.. And the misconception I think is that if you're not like starting a company at 22 or 25 or 27, that you've kind of lost the narrative.. The reality is, at YC, the median age is 30, so half the founders getting funded at YC, which is a seed fund, are gonna be over 30.. And then if you actually look at the top YC companies, you hear about the Patrick and John Collison's Stripe, you hear about Alex Wang at Scale, but it's the German proverb, the exception proves the rule..

The rule is actually people with experience and a network and understanding hiring, firing, these things matter.. There's a recent Stanford graduate, so at Applied we recruit, this is for me also a recruiting event, at Applied, we recruit from Stanford, Berkeley, and MIT, specifically because these schools, there's just raw intelligence and they like startups.. And we had a recent Stanford grad, the company's seven years old, as mentioned, Stanford grad who had been with us a couple years, he's I'd say 24 years old or something, said, I'm gonna leave, I'm gonna start a company because, and this is not self-serving, very earnestly, like, I don't think you're ready to do this, there's a huge risk, like if you're a chief executive officer, that means you have to know all of those functions really well.. So it's not enough that you just know you're a good software engineer or you're good at sales or marketing or HR, there's like a dozen different functions that you have to really, really know.. So this Stanford alum says, but you've said in talks that you can't learn being a founder other than just doing it.. And the analogy that I used as I was like, me and Peter Ludwig who's my co-founder, it's like Peter and I are standing at the foothill, at the base of Everest, we're at base camp and we're ready, and we know the challenge that is in front of us, we're sober and we're aware,

and you're walking up with flip flops and you can't say, well, it's just about climbing a mountain, right? And if I fail, it's okay.. So there's a window you're trying to hit.. You also don't wanna wait too long because if you wait too long, the momentum of life takes over.. You fall into the American system, which is you buy a house and you get a car and this debt takes over and these obligations take over, relationships happen and kids happen, and suddenly you're not in the ability to go start a company, which is a fairly high risk venture.. Generally speaking for people in this room, it's not that high risk because venture capitalists are gonna give you money..

So if it doesn't work out, you're not gonna be homeless, you just don't make a return for some rich people.. So generally, the risk is lower.. So what's the risk when you're 35 to start a company? It's ego and it's opportunity cost.. So at that point you're like, hey, I can do a bunch of things, and the market actually doesn't care if you have experience.. So you're taking the same amount of risk as somebody who's 25, who has a lot less knowledge, so you have to find this window.. So what I'm saying here is there's misconceptions all around, from your experience, to timing, and you should be extremely careful in reading startup entertainment, TechCrunch, Hacker News, whatever your fill is and extrapolating and saying, well, because I've heard lots of young founders do it outta Stanford, I should immediately do it.. It's like you should really objectively say, can I lead a group of people to build a business? And that's what we're talking about, and we're all on the same page, a business' revenue minus expenses equals profits, you need to know like all those components.. It's not just I have a good idea, let's do it...