

"I may be the founder, but I'm not the boss" Huib van Bockel, founder of TENZING

There's no 'one size fits all' for starting a business. You can do as much research into it as you want - read books, go on courses, speak to peers - the list is neverending. From doing the background research and using your own career experience, you'll get an idea of how you want to run your business - but until you've actually got it off the ground, no one knows if your idea will work.

Temps de lecture : minute

9 February 2023

I wanted to see what I was made of. Use what I learned from big companies that I'd worked at - like Red Bull, MTV and Unilever - and apply them to my own company. It's been a steeper and longer climb than I imagined, but I'm starting to see the summit and it's beautiful looking back on TENZING's journey.

Every startup story is completely different. But one thing I know for sure, is that no founder finds it easy. In fact, it's pretty uncomfortable. You're putting a lot on the line for 'just' an idea. Sacrifices have to be made, your mentality has to change, and those you surround yourself with have to be the people that will support you despite the falls and to remind you why you chose to go down this path.

Swallow your pride and ask for help

A piece of advice I will always stand by and that I try to instill in my team is; tap into your network. Ask your contacts for help whether they're ex-

colleagues, ex-clients, ex-partners, ex-friends-colleagues-partner...

No doubt somewhere along the way you will have given someone a leg up, and you'll be surprised how often people remember the small things you've done for them and their willingness to return the favour.

Use that network strategically for help, advice, introductions and support. And most importantly, make sure you continue to put yourself out there to carry on growing that network.

When I started TENZING, I found myself feeling that I had to start my network from scratch. No longer could I rely on big name brands to sit alongside my job title. Creating a network or building on an existing one can be a struggle, but finding people who are interested in your vision and will back you makes it all totally worth it.

Mistakes will be made - own them and learn from them

Running a business will always involve trial and error - you never know if something will work unless you try it out first.

For example, when I started TENZING I didn't want to be the only one to benefit. I wanted everyone to feel free from hierarchy and I felt that important element to that philosophy was for my team to define their own salaries.

We communicated to our team the total pot of money we had for salary increases. After peer reviews people received a performance score, which from that everyone could say: I deserve that much money from the pot.

This ultimately became one of my lowest moments as a founder, the whole concept didn't work. I didn't realise the incredibly tricky

psychological side of choosing your own salary. Naturally, everyone worried about taking too little or too much of the pie. It began to affect everyone's mindset - so we got rid of the idea.

If something does work, it's important to to acknowledge it face-on. This allows you to learn from it and find a better system moving forward.



Read also

Most energy drinks are full of synthetic caffeine, artificial mood boosters and sugar, TENZING are changing that

Bosses are overrated

Something I'd realised through my career was that I've always hated

people telling me what to do. I have had some really great bosses, I just never liked the idea of control or checking up. I believe that when you have freedom and the space to decide for yourself, you make better decisions.

You can hide behind your boss; if your boss tells you to do something and then it doesn't work out, you can see it as their fault rather than taking responsibility for the fact that *you* did it. Which means you don't learn from your mistakes.

This is something I didn't want to happen when I launched TENZING - which is why we operate a self-managed structure. It's not always easy but I've found it empowers our team to stick to their guns and thrive. It gives people the opportunity to take their lives into their own hands, to take full responsibility for their own development.

There are many positives to the initiative - like the authority of being able to choose your own path. Everybody chooses their own coach which is a bit like the concept of a traditional boss: they coach you, help you stick to your commitments and objectives, but the big difference is that you choose that boss and you can fire that boss too. If you feel like there is somebody else that you could learn more from, you have the right to choose another coach.

Imagine how groundbreaking it would be if everybody in the world could hire and fire their own boss. The whole rat-race would disappear. You would be judged on your actual leadership qualities and on the impact you make on the business and the team around you. Not how fast you move upwards or how big your team is.

Don't always focus on the end goal

One of the big mistakes you can make in business is to focus too much on

the end goal and forget the journey. It's important to appreciate the stage you're at as a startup, how far you've come and be open with your team about what needs to be done better.

At TENZING we run a quarterly speed feedback session which allows each member of the team to give honest and constructive feedback. At the end, team members score each other on how well they did - it can be painful at times but it means there's no hiding.

As your startup grows, it's important to keep the lines of communication open with every employee. This will allow your business to continue growing with the values you instilled as a small startup.

Huib Van Bockel is the founder and CEO of TENZING.

Article by Huib van Bockel