

With Elephants you can connect, collaborate, and conquer your goals, whatever they are

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Harri Thomas, cofounder of Elephants about bringing people together to conquer goals as a team, giving back to the startup community and coaching powered by AI.

Temps de lecture : minute

16 November 2023

Elephants helps people achieve their personal goals - whatever the goal. It allows you to track your goal progress, share goals with friends for added accountability, and collaborate with coaches powered by AI for extra guidance and motivation.

What was the catalyst for launching the product?

I've always set personal goals because I found that it makes it easier to decide what to do in the moment with a clear idea about where I want to end up. But it wasn't until I started sharing my goals with friends that my progress really took off. I'm not sure if it's the added support, accountability, or just the fun of collaborating on goals with friends - but I've found it's incredibly effective.

One of my goals is to give back to the startup community. I do this by helping other founders navigate problems, drawing on lessons I learned building my first business. This is how I met Vito, my cofounder. Like me, Vito was a founder, and was also a lifelong goal setter. We bonded over

the impact of sharing goals with friends, and a shared frustration with the available tools. So on a whim, we decided to build a simple web app to make our lives a little bit easier. It was a quick design and build which was meant only for us, and never meant to be a business. But, when it started to take off, we realised we might be onto something bigger.

Tell me about the product - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers, USP and so on?

In Elephants, you can browse thousands of suggested goals including goals set by the likes of Elon Musk and Beyonce, or make your own. Then, you join a private group chat where you can talk about this goal with others. In this chat, you can update your progress, kind of like posting updates on Instagram. Over time, these updates build up creating a cool timeline showing how far you've come. If you like competing with friends, there are leaderboards and streaks to see who's doing the best. And if you need a hand, there are coaches powered by AI available to keep you accountable, support you, and share their expertise.

Elephants, unlike other goal-setting apps, puts social connections at the heart of the experience. When we look at human history, it's largely a story of people working together in groups to explore, achieve and overcome. *It's in our DNA!* Elephants embraces this super-power and taps into it by putting people at the centre of the app. It's all about bringing people together to conquer goals as a team.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

A lot has changed since our first little web app, and we're working harder than ever to build something people love.

We've raised a pre-seed round, hired a team and have launched our app on both iOS and Android. We've been featured by some major press outlets, had tens of thousands of downloads, and added coaches to the app. But most importantly, we've played a small part in helping thousands of people achieve their personal goals. From staying off booze for 60 days, to writing books together, to ticking off bucket list items like ballooning in Cappadocia and running marathons - Elephants is now helping people. It was always the plan! But it's great to see it actually happening.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

There's so much to like about it, but for me there are three biggies:

1. The almost perfect alignment between your personal goals and the company's objectives is special, and brings a lot of meaning to your work
2. The opportunity to explore your curiosity and be original in your expression
3. The ability to make quick, high-impact decisions

Which founders or businesses do you see as being the most inspirational?

For me, I can't go past Tony Hsieh, who built Zappo's with a simple premise to focus on the customer. Tony is quoted as saying that 'Zappo's is a customer service company that just happens to sell shoes', which I love as a sentiment.

As an Australian, I also have a soft spot for Canva and Atlassian, both of which fought against the odds in their early days to build break-out,

enduringly successful businesses. They were underdogs, building technology on the other side of the world, and now they're world-beating companies.

Which other figures in your life inspire you?

I consider myself fortunate to be in the company of some incredibly inspiring founders, who are all working hard to will something from their imagination into existence.

Some examples are Ned Dwyer at Great Question, who is building an all in one research tool for software companies. Shauna Sweeney at Tender, who's focused on improving the lives of caregivers, a vital but often overlooked role. Then there's Yiu Yin Yau of Hakkawise, reimagining the sustainable personal care category and uplifting underrepresented founders. The list goes on, but all of them are at the batter's plate, taking a swing at working to make the world a little different, and a little better. And if that doesn't get you out of bed in the morning, I'm not sure what will.

What has been your biggest business fail?

A big learning opportunity came in my previous business. In the early days, my cofounder and I were so busy fighting for our survival that we didn't take the time to consider what would happen if we made it out alive. So when the business became profitable, we had different ideas of what the goals for the business should be, which became difficult to untangle that far down the line. So in Elephants, I've been sure to make sure me and Vito's goals are aligned from the outset.

The good news is that no 'business fail' has been fatal - so I expect, and maybe even look forward to (!) having many more fails.

What are the things you're really good at as a leader?

With the big caveat that I'm probably not the best judge of this, what I've been told is that I'm good at bringing people in, making them feel involved and getting them excited about a shared vision for the future. What I try to focus on is understanding what people are motivated by, and then setting goals that are meaningful for them, and the company. When those two things are aligned, performance tends to take care of itself.

Which areas do you need to improve on?

Knowing when 'close enough is good enough' vs. when things need absolute precision. For the age and stage of our company, I usually lean towards 'good enough', preferring speed over perfection. But it's caught me out a few times, because for users of a social app like ours, their point of comparison is TikTok - which is an incredibly high benchmark - but also the benchmark we need to meet, if we want to compete for people's time.

What's in store for the future of the business?

I'm optimistic about the future for Elephants because I like the way our team is navigating challenges and responding to our users' needs at the moment. I think if we continue on the trajectory in front of us, we'll soon have a sustainable business, that is helping not just thousands, but millions of people realize their potential, which we're pretty pumped about.

What advice would you give to other founders or future founders?

Just start.

I speak to quite a few would-be-founders, and lots of people are worried that they'll fail before they even start, which I think is wild, because the only surefire way to fail is by not even trying. Plus, in my experience, you rarely regret trying something new even if it doesn't work out, because all experiences are cumulative, and very few decisions are irreversible. So just give it a crack, and if it doesn't work out, you can move on and find a new job, richer for having had the experience.

And finally, a more personal question! We like to ask everyone we interview about their daily routine and the rules they live by. Is it up at 4am for yoga, or something a little more traditional?

One of my goals this year was to run a marathon, which I recently did with the help of some friends in Elephants. This involved lots of early morning runs, but since then, my routine is now a lot more... routine!

Having a set of long term goals is key. Knowing what matters and where you aim to be in the future can help guide your everyday choices. Having some long term relationships, career, finances and fitness goals helps me understand what to pay attention to, and what I can ignore. It's easy to get swept along in the inertia of day to day life, and so having some goals to guide decisions acts like bumpers in a bowling alley, keeping you on track and moving you *generally* in the right direction. But to extend the analogy, it doesn't mean you'll get a strike! And that's where the fun is.

Harri Thomas is the cofounder of *Elephants*.

Article by Harri Thomas