

FuturU, empowering healthcare workers to achieve their potential

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Michael Manuccia, CEO of FuturU about universal access to free education, healthcare and keeping your sanity intact.

Temps de lecture : minute

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What was the catalyst for launching FuturU?

In the last decade, every metric for worker vacancies, turnover and burnout in health and social care has become worse. In addition, the cost of healthcare education has gone up in a way that's not proportional to the opportunities that it provides. We knew we had to do something to bring down the cost of healthcare education and help people to get into - and stay in - jobs they're going to love for decades.

Health and social care around the world needs passionate, resilient and skilled people, but we're asking them to take on tens of thousands of pounds of debt to do it. We launched *FuturU* to make it easy for anyone, anywhere in the world to gain the healthcare qualifications they need to join the industry and move up the career ladder - for free.

Tell me about the business

We're on a mission to empower healthcare workers to achieve their potential through universal access to free education. More than 70,000 healthcare professionals use our online learning platform to gain the essential skills and qualifications needed to maintain a career in

healthcare. We've also built a platform for healthcare organisations to manage their staff's learning and development at a fraction of the cost. It's now easier than ever to quickly train and upskill your workforce in a way that's super joined up and efficient.

We're also leveraging technology to increase the quality of training available to healthcare professionals, thereby improving the quality of care. A lot of online learning is nothing more than a tick-box exercise with multiple choice questions, which isn't engaging or memorable. We saw a gap in the market to offer healthcare training that's much more immersive and interactive, allowing learners to practise different skills within a virtual care setting. Healthcare training needs to enter the 21st century and FuturU is paving the way.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

Since launching in May 2023, the team has grown significantly - we're now 50 people operating across the UK, US, Spain and Portugal. You don't really start to find your identity until people have a chance to work with each other, so that's probably been the biggest shift over the past few months. We now have a team that knows each other, is comfortable with each other and there's a lot of psychological safety. Everyone is really invested in the mission and the vision of the world we're trying to create.

Tell us about the working culture at FuturU.

Everyone at FuturU is super ambitious and passionate about solving big societal problems. A lot of our team have prior healthcare experience, or have friends and family members working in the sector, which ties them to the mission in a really personal way.

As a remote-first organisation, we also work hard to ensure everyone is

aligned on what we're trying to achieve. We're transparent when it comes to our goals, plans for the future and decision-making, what we know and what we don't know. I think that's created an environment where people trust in one another and what we're doing.

We also spend a lot of time talking about joy at work, as we think this can have an enormous impact on people's wellbeing. In our weekly all-hands meeting, colleagues are encouraged to share a couple of moments or events from the week that stood out to them and brought them joy. These range from accomplishments at work, connecting with a colleague, and personal moments.

How are you funded?

We're backed by a small number of visionary investors with lots of healthcare experience, who are really bought into our mission, vision and core values. We also generate income through partnerships with training providers and care organisations, which we're doubling down on this year.

In the next 12 months, we hope to raise a series A venture round to accelerate our impact even further, particularly as we look to expand outside of the UK and invest more heavily in our learning technology.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

We operate in a highly regulated industry that isn't known for technological innovation, but has great use cases for technological problem-solving, and no shortage of issues to address. To ensure we're bringing our customers on this journey with us, rather than alienating them, we aim to meet them where they are. We avoid making assumptions about the issues our customers face and spend a lot of time asking open-ended questions and learning as much as possible.

How does FuturU answer an unmet need?

Keeping your skills up-to-date is a requirement for working in healthcare, but many professionals are struggling to keep up with the cost of training. Our research discovered that nearly half of nurses and care workers are funding their own training courses, costing them an average of £5,660 a year. What's worse, one in three have skipped meals to pay for it, and some are getting into debt. FuturU is fundamentally shifting who pays for this training – from the learners least able to afford it, to their employers.

We're also democratising access to best-in-class healthcare training, by making it available to anyone, anywhere. Whether you're an unpaid carer looking after a loved one, a student nurse, or on a career break, FuturU is completely free to access on the devices you use every day. We want to empower people on their learning journey so that they feel in control.

Finally, we're witnessing a huge exodus of talent in healthcare, which is only getting worse. Across the board, organisations are struggling to retain and upskill staff, as well as recruit people that will be effective in that environment. There's not a lot of cohesive, joined up data to do any of these things in health and social care right now, which is something we're trying to put right.

What's in store for the future?

When I talk with nurses and care workers, they often tell me that the best part of training is shadowing someone on the job. The problem is, that's not very scalable and what you learn varies a lot depending on what happens on that specific shift. My hope is that we'll soon be able to bring 'job shadowing' to life in a virtual environment, by bringing together the top nurses around the world and have them work through a virtual shift together and share best practices. As a learner, you'll be able to see the approaches that these experts take as you follow them on that shift.

We're keen to push the boundaries of what's possible when it comes to creating high-quality, immersive training content and we think there's huge potential in this space.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Being a founder is uncomfortable. You'll have to put yourself in a lot of positions where you could fail and not let that get to you. You also have to be prepared for your job to change every six months. Just when you think you're getting the hang of it, you'll probably need to pass it on to someone else. Knowing when to let a certain responsibility go and how to empower the person taking it over is key to growing a startup and keeping your sanity intact. You'll need a lot of help on your journey - make sure you let people know that you appreciate them along the way!

What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I begin work early and almost immediately after waking up (I drink a lot of espresso!) I try to have unscheduled time in my diary each day to just 'think' about stuff. It's easy just to focus on tasks but your job as a founder is to figure out the things that are complicated and that can't always be done in five minutes.

I'm also trying to be a present, supportive parent. Sometimes that means taking a break from work in the afternoon to spend time with my kids and resuming work when they go to sleep. I've recently been reading a book called 'Good Inside' by Becky Kennedy, which has a lot of crossover with good management and psychological safety for adults, and with raising children. There's an interesting concept in there about boundaries, which I've found particularly useful: "Boundaries are what you will do, not what

they should stop doing.” Worth a read!

Michael Manuccia is the Chief Executive Officer of *FuturU*.

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