

HealthKey, revolutionising how health and well-being services are accessed and paid for

As part of our quick founder questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to David Joerring, CEO and cofounder of HealthKey about the current healthcare crisis, Founders Factory and the importance of staying calm in the chaos associated with a startup journey

Temps de lecture : minute

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At HealthKey we want to tackle the growing healthcare crisis, by bringing health providers and payers such as employers and insurers together in an integrated network to make healthcare more accessible and affordable.

What was the catalyst for launching the product?

The founding story is slightly uncommon I suppose. I have worked in health and around healthcare a large part of my career, and been absolutely amazed at the fantastic products and services being developed by fantastic people, like doctors developing novel treatments or championing preventive and personalised health. At the same time it has been disheartening to see how despite those efforts, too often it doesn't reach the people that really need it. I was working as an operator at a great HealthTech Thruva at the time and knew I wanted to start a new venture focused on the problem of health access and affordability. I was incredibly fortunate to meet Founders Factory, who in their studio were looking for

an entrepreneur to found a new venture tackling this particular problem, and from the very start they were a fantastic partner. Healthcare is a particularly complicated and often slow moving industry, and building a venture that has a network at its core means that there is an inherent cold start problem from the outset. Working with Founders Factory in their studio programme helped us get a head start on some of those challenges early on and get a network off the ground.

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?

Really high level we want to help people improve their health span, as in live a larger part of their life in good health.

We look to do this by giving people a “front door” to personalised health. Meaning that they can find the information, products or services they need, while automatically being able to see what and how it can be covered by their employer, insurer, through salary sacrifice, or self-pay, or any combination of those.

One of the ways we are probably most different from other solutions, is that we take being user first to quite an extreme. What I mean by this is that the user “owns” the access, and anyone can create a free HealthKey account and we don’t have a premium or subscription tier for end users.

Payers, such as employers and insurers give their employees or customers access to services through the platform, for example in the form of an employee health budget as a benefit. The end user may have multiple payers connected such as both an insurer and employer.

One of the things we knew we wanted to do from the outset was help improve access to traditionally underserved health areas, such as in

women's health, neurodiversity, and many other areas that have for example historically not been included in employee health benefits, as they may have been seen as too "niche". By bringing together a network of different providers, we help companies provide truly personalised care to employees, so that even if only one employee needs a specific service they are still getting access at preferential rates.

How has the business evolved since its launch?

A lot in what feels like both the longest and fastest almost year and a half since we launched.

For a while our focus and thinking was very much centred around just the payment process for health services and how to bring multiple types of payers together and simplify the processes around paying for health services.

While the vision has stayed quite intact from the outset, we have taken a very curious and open approach, making sure that we allow ourselves to learn from the partners we work with across the network. I think one of the most interesting developments has come from working closely with insurance side, understanding more about the specifics of how preventive and proactive health will fit in the future of health insurance.

What is your favourite thing about being a founder?

One of my favourite things has definitely been meeting and working with my co-founder Tudor. We are not some of those founders that have known and worked together for years, but jumped at the opportunity to work together I think from a shared passion and set of values, and it is a

decision I am incredibly thankful for.

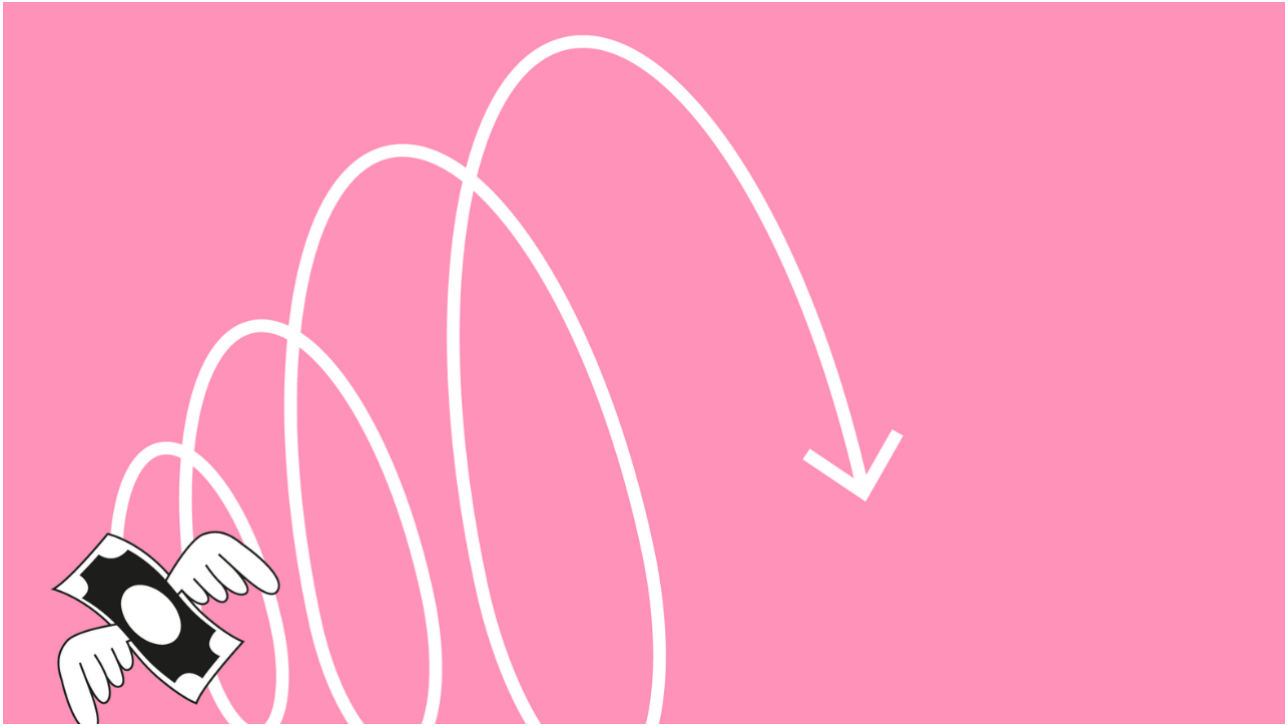
Then, as I suppose many founders will echo, there is something magical about seeing people use a product that you have developed and seeing it make a real difference to them. There is a real “pinch myself” sense to that which is amazing.

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

I am particularly inspired by founders and businesses that dare do things differently and seem to “over focus” on customer or stakeholder needs. Those that do things that seem to oversteer in ways, like the extremes Tony Hsieh took for customer services with Zappos, which is in some ways echoed in the restaurateur Will Guidara’s approach to what he calls “unreasonable hospitality”.

Which other figures in your life inspire you?

People that don’t let societal norms or expectations limit their curiosity and approach to life. I grew up with a grandmother who had Parkinson’s, but who didn’t let it stop her from going dancing and skiing well into old age, which taught me a lot about the power of taking a “why wouldn’t it work” attitude to life, in addition to influencing my passion for health services.



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What has been your biggest business fail?

I think the ones that stick with me the most are hiring failures. Knowing that when someone turns out to not be the right fit, this is as much if not more down to my failures (or ours as the organisation) as anything else. I believe that everyone wants to succeed in a job, and as the employer I and we, it is often something in our process and assessment that has gone wrong when things don't work out.

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

I like to think that I am really good at staying calm and focused in the midst of the chaos that is an intrinsic part of the startup journey. The best leaders I have worked with have been those that were able to not let

chaos and external interruptions impact the team, but rather be the one that helps everyone stay focused, and help remove the interruptions and roadblocks that may otherwise hinder the team from doing what they do best. It is a trait I very consciously try to incorporate in my own leadership style.

Which areas do you need to improve on?

I'm definitely in the process of learning how to lead a fast growing team. Going from being just founders for a long time to now really expanding the team changes the role completely, and as a first time founder is very new to me. I do what I can to take advice from people that have been on that journey before and try to find my own personal style.

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

A core focus at the moment is expanding our network of payers, i.e. employers and insurers. We are in a position where we really starting to see the product work well with the early users, and can now start to focus a lot more on expansion. Similarly expanding to more and more health areas. We were initially very focused on preventive and proactive health, and in particular Digital solutions. We are increasingly expanding to more "traditional" health areas, with the aim to be able to provide users with access to all the health areas they need access to. Finally, working on ways to better support users on their health journey. We among other things look at how to bridge the information gap that can create friction in the delivery of health services through content partnerships.

What advice would you give to other

founders or future founders?

Build a strong network and support system of people who will help you and root for you. Both business related and in your personal life. Makes dealing with uncertainty a lot easier and serendipitous encounters and opportunities can truly mean a world of change at the early stages. And ask for help. More than feels comfortable. In my experience most people are open to helping you if you ask, and when starting out help is needed.

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?

Nothing as extreme as 4am yoga. I used to work in management consulting and learned first hand how my ability to think creatively and be inspired really suffered from very long nights of working, and so I am very deliberate about working hours and planning, knowing that quantity of output might go up with more hours, but quality does not always follow.

Other than that, I have found that I cooking can be very meditative and it can really help me decompress. There is something great about doing something very different after a full day of looking mostly at a screen, and with some luck the product can also be quite enjoyable.

David Joerring is the CEO and cofounder of [HealthKey](#).

