

FOUNDER AS MOTHER

To be a Founder is to accept an exceptional role: to be both midwife and mother. Woman has been celebrated since ancient times as Maiden, Mother, and Crone; one of her gifts is her ability to shepherd new joy into this world despite the pain of doing so. As life-threatening as it is miraculous, giving birth can and sometimes does cost the mother and/or the child their very lives. The woman's nearest and dearest do their best to support her. The more they understand and empathize with what their champion is going through, the more they can help.

Your start-up is, in many ways, such a child. A brainchild, if you will. Your creation. You create a new "relationship", an entity to which you must be dedicated and nurturing if you want it to survive and thrive.

I'm not just referring to "mompreneurs"—who balance work and motherhood—although they are certainly included. I could just as easily have used the metaphor of Dr. Frankenstein and his obsessive creation. The fact that the fictional scientist's experiment turned out more monster than man is a detail.

I speak of *creation*. I speak of the Founder as Parent. And here's why.

Raising a Brainchild: Nine Reasons Founding Is Like Parenting

1. It's A Big Decision.

Deciding to launch a venture, like deciding to have a baby, is not something to be taken lightly. You're putting on a new hat, tackling whole new role, and turning the page to a very different chapter in your life. Whether you're working overtime or quitting your job, using up your savings or borrowing money, going at this alone or pairing up with someone else... you have to be in it for the long haul. Have you thought this through? Have you researched what you're getting yourself into? Can you commit towards this new most important entity in your life?

2. You'd Fight For It... To The Death.

This is yours. Man or monster, your creation will always be a part of you. Your brainchild—like your child—will be adored, always on your mind, it relates to you 100%, and you would fight to the death to keep it safe. For a long while, it will be the center of your life—and even when it's not, it will always be a big part of it.

3. It's Easier With A Partner.

Raising a child on your own isn't impossible, but it can be extremely difficult. A

wonderful co-parent—your wife, husband, or partner—can make all the difference in the world. Not only can this person pitch in with the expenses, time, resources, and energy, but the right person doubles the love, fulfillment, and psychological rewards along the way. Just so, the right co-founder in business will share the highs and lows with you, improving your health, happiness, and chances of success.

The greatest Founders were part of a team, even if these partnerships weren't well-known or permanent. Bill Gates and Paul Allen. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Larry Page and Sergei Brin.

As the African proverb goes: *If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together...*

4. Everyone Has Advice (And Will Share It).

Some advice is amazing, essential, and following it will save you a lot of time, money, and heartache. Some advice—sometimes well-intentioned, sometimes not—doesn't apply to you. It doesn't matter that some folks have never walked in your shoes; you'll get parenting advice from people who have never met your child, much less had kids themselves. Sometimes you just have to smile politely and nod, and then just go ahead and do what you were going to do anyway. (Unless it's your mother. She's got proof.)

Just so, you'll get plenty of education from investors, market researchers, stockholders, colleagues, and even (inadvertently) competitors. Listen to what they say and filter it wisely. Remember that it will be a learning process no matter what. You can't always go by the book. The start-up you create is unique, a brainchild unlike any other in the world, and as such your relationship with it doesn't come with a manual.

5. It's Expensive.

Have you raised a child? Have you launched a start-up? Then need I say more? For the rest of us—let's say that there are a number of sacrifices you're going to begin making for the sake of your offspring or creation. Those designer jeans and that vacation to Aruba can wait. Priorities include diapers and baby formulas... or laser printers and license fees.

But you'll make these sacrifices—and many, many more—because you believe in this little person or this big idea. You love it. And, yes, you will sell the shirt off your back to ensure that it succeeds.

6. Goodbye Sleep.

In the beginning, it is highly unlikely that you will sleep more than is humanely necessary. Your baby needs you to survive, and so does your startup. You learn to live with a crazy schedule, to be on-call, to multi-task like your life depends on it. There will always be the next feeding (round of financing), next diaper-changing (checking in with clients and prospects), next learning experience like baby's first word or first

crawl (seminars, market analyses, meetings, projects)...

The first months and years are the most taxing and, in many way, the most critical. You're loath to let someone else take over, because they can't do it exactly as you can. Most important of all—you want to be there for your child or brainchild. You wouldn't *want* anyone else to take over, even if they could. Mompreneurs make the best entrepreneurs because they've mastered the most essential skills—multi-tasking, budgeting, creativity, flexibility, problem-solving, and living for something they're passionate about...

7. There Are No Shortcuts.

Parenting takes time, and it never ends. You continue nurturing your family—personal or professional—all your life. You'll always be the Mother or Father or Founder. It's a rough rollercoaster that you learn to master on the go. Emotions run high—there will be joy at your baby's first laugh or your company's first contract; there will be despair at the non-stop crying or the overwhelming bills and obligations.

It won't happen from one day to the next. Your baby won't wake up one day as an adult. Your startup won't start spouting profits on the second day. Yet a newborn will grow up, and a startup can't be a startup forever. Though you'll be nostalgic for those old Kodak moments, that's as it should be—you *don't* want to keep raising a baby or a brainchild forever. You work to help it evolve into the best it can be—self-reliant, well-reputed, respected, and loved.

8. You'll Make New Alliances.

When donning a new role or embarking on a new journey, it is inevitable you will meet and interact with new people. As a parent, you'll click with other parents who are going through the same things and sharing the same experiences. You'll learn from and grow with each other. You'll form new networks and friendships.

As an entrepreneur, you'll also want to surround yourself with like-minded people and respective mentors whom you can learn from. Surround yourself with the type of people you want to become. Surround yourself with people who will teach you, celebrate you, challenge you, and bring out the best in you. Entrepreneur and author Jim Rohn credits much of our success to this equation: "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

9. You Learn So Much (About So Many Things... Including Yourself).

You have the opportunity to grow greatly alongside your business. When your company prospers, you will leap with joy and pride; when it suffers you will recoil in frustration and sadness. Losing it may leave you heartbroken. I had a business that died a premature death, and a small piece of me died with it. There were external factors beyond my control; I had to remove them from my regrets. It took me nine months of grieving, but I realized that crying over spilt milk wouldn't change a thing.

You learn from failure and pain. What do you learn? You learn what to do—or not to do—next time. You learn how the world works, what society is like, what surprises life keeps up its sleeve. And sometimes you must learn to release control over things you *can't* control. Sometimes, shit just happens. Sometimes, the cards simply aren't stacked in your favor. It's not the player's fault. Sometimes it's bad luck. Sometimes the cards are rigged. Sometimes it's life's say of urging you to focus on the next round. And you learn how to do that. Life is a series of spirals, it rhymes as it goes.

Don't fear getting back up. You won't win every battle. Know this. You win sometimes. Choose your battles and focus on the war.

"There are winners and losers", they taught us at school. But let me introduce you to a new concept, something you may have heard before but haven't yet swallowed: **you win or you learn. Time and love heal all wounds. You have a whole lifetime ahead of you to fight, a whole lifetime of striving for greatness.**

Risky but rewarding, Founding can ultimately be the best thing you've done in your life.