

"This is the guide I wish I had had when I first came to Silicon Valley."

-Nathan D. Harris

NOTES FROM SILICON VALLEY

25 lessons learned during one year of living in the world's No.1 startup hub.

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When I first moved to Silicon Valley, I started taking notes of the lessons learned from every encounter and mentor.

I've come some way since moving;

- I graduated from 2 Silicon Valley accelerators,
- Hit over \$1MM in sales with one of my startups,
- Became a mentor at the Google Launchpad Manos Accelerator
- And (most importantly) learned how to surround myself with great people.

I kept all these lessons on a notepad and will share them here for the first time.

These are the 23 lessons I learned from living in Silicon Valley for one year:

1. On becoming successful:

- We are a result of our *behaviors*. Fall in love with *behaviors* that turn into positive *results*. Don't just fall in love with the results. That goes for finances, fitness, health, and much more.
- There is admiration, inspiration, and envy. Take your passive admiration and turn it into inspiration. Take your negative envy and turn it into inspiration. You're so close to feeling a positive force, just anchor it to inspiration if you want to go anywhere.
- Become buddies with people that ALREADY go to the gym/wake up early/make good money. Don't try to convince your "fat" buddy to start going to the gym with you. It's much harder to pull that off.
- If you think people at the gym are vain and shallow... How can you ever hope to become like them? If you think millionaires are greedy and heartless, how can you ever hope to learn from and replicate their behaviors? *You can't become what you resent.*
- "Whatever you think the world is withholding from you, you are withholding from the world." - @EckhartTolle
- What would the smarter, healthier version of yourself be doing right now? Why aren't you doing it?

- Leaders don't have followers. Leaders create other leaders.

2. On advisors:

- Most give opinions, not personal experience; and that's ok, just be conscious of this. They haven't necessarily done before what they're telling you to do.
- Be picky with your advisors, they are your coaches. You are the quarterback.
- Most mentors will teach you how to be like them, the best ones will teach you how to be the best version of yourself.
- Advisors should help you focus and take stuff out from your todo list, not find more things to add on. Whenever they say "update your pitch deck", ask "Okay, should I do that instead of developing my app?" Tasks need to be taken out in order for new ones to be brought in.
- Be careful, most advisors advise the startup and not the entrepreneur. They will give you the right advice for your startup at the wrong time for your life. Work with people that will help you navigate your whole package (children, spouse, debt, etc.)

3. On fund raising:

- Get to a point in your career where you can call up your friends to fund your new idea.
- You can't build a bonfire with nothing but a match. You need lots of sticks and gasoline. Your team represents the sticks. VC money should be the gasoline on your already working fire; make sure you don't see VC money as the match or the sticks. It's meant to amplify what already works.
- Make sure you have real product-market fit, not product-VC fit. Nobody wants to be in a failed startup even if it raised funds. Make sure yours fits the market instead of getting the quick VC check.

4. On the current VC landscape:

- VC's don't play into the big bubble. They play into small bubbles like AI, ML, AR, VR, etc.

- They invest in Twitter only because it looks good on their portfolio for the long term.
- They make most of their money when the next VC invests, not when the company goes IPO or gets acquired. Those trophies are for the late stage VC investors, not the early stage guys.
- Some investors literally invest in Patent portfolios because it means that they can sue somebody if they want to. Everybody is suable by somebody else by the current rules.

5. On Silicon Valley:

- There is no success border patrol in Silicon Valley. Show up! It's yours too. These opportunities are not reserved for people better than you. They are reserved for those brave enough to demand their attention.

6. On product-market fit:

- You almost can't be too niche. You can DEFINITELY be too broad. Most startups are too broad.
- Don't make a product that nobody wants. It's not about you, it's about your end users.

7. On humility:

- The advantage you had yesterday, will be replaced by the trends of tomorrow. You don't have to do anything wrong, but as long as your competitors catch the wave and do it RIGHT, you can lose out and fail.
- You should get excited about the accomplishments of others, not intimidated. It means you can do it too.

8. On viral campaigns:

- People only share things that make THEM look good; not things that make YOU look good.
- One great piece of content can change your career! You control how often you go at bat with great content. If you're GOOD enough, put out content every single day. You will inevitably rise to the top. Think what would

happen if a 14 year old girl with Beyonce's voice put out a Facebook Live video every day. Within a year she would be signed. You control how often people are exposed to you content. If you think you've got what it takes, PLAY THE DISTRIBUTION GAME. Have consistency on your side.

9. On social media engagement:

- It's easy to treat people as a collective instead of as individuals when you are presented with opportunities at scale. Make the effort to thank every compliment, answer every tweet. People see it. It matters.

10. On self awareness:

- Don't think other entrepreneurs don't have bad times. You're only seeing their highlight reel.

11. On time management:

- Time is the only finite source. You can always get more of everything else, but not time. Your time is running out.
- Entrepreneurs get help for resources that we can recover like money and human resources. Why don't we get "accountants" or "coaches" for our only limited source in life? Figure this out. Get into an accelerator, get mentors, onboard advisors, etc. Whatever it is; fix it. This matters.
- Compound interest also applies to work-life balance. If you work really hard at the beginning of your career and you get more done and work harder than others, there will be a compound effect. The earlier you start, the more you get to enjoy the benefits of it.

12. On making perfect deals:

- What you want should be the same thing that everyone else in that deal wants. Example: Don't enter your customers into a raffle to win an iPad as a reward to download your app. You want app downloads, your users want an iPad. This is not a good deal.
- Make deals where you win no matter what happens. Even if you don't win, fix your attitude so you still win. You always have to win. Everything is a dot

in your story to success. You're perfect in this moment; you're just not finished yet.

13. On benefits to users:

- Figure out how to have such good product/market fit that your clients are rewarded by getting MORE of your product and they LOVE it. You shouldn't have to rely on external incentives.
- Find out what your users want. Some can be incentivized with a verified badge or a free download. Understand your audience intimately; this will help you make better decisions.

14. On having too many features:

- Most entrepreneurs want it ALL from day one. Platforms are crowded with buggy features. It's hard to market an app that makes no money and has 0 fanatics on day one.
- Key to success is focus: have the 1 or 2 things that your app does and your customers want; make them great and grow with your audience as you launch more features.

15. On perfection paralysis:

- Perfection is overrated. Learn from Facebook and, "Move fast and break things."

16. On being "right" about a trend:

- You can't break out unless the platform itself is breaking out. Bet on the platform that's growing. When the tide rises, all boats rise with it.

17. On getting funded:

- We always hear, "It's all about the team", and we think that it means the team has to be down to earth and likeable. It does not. It means the team has to show a proven record of success and commitment to the relentless pursuit of excellence. Nobody gets this badge overnight, it's like being an

athlete or a professional musician. People won't see you have "it" unless you've been pruning yourself through years and years of discipline.

18. On networking:

- We always hear: "It's not what you know, it's who you know." If you come from a humble background, you'll take offence to this and think that you can't know big people since you don't have that built-in network. Get that chip off your shoulder. Build a network of people that you love being around and bring tons of value into your life.

19. On hiring:

- Entrepreneurs hear, "The team is everything" and they think they have to go out and be really picky about who they hire. Instead, they should be worried about *becoming* the right people to work for. You can only attract all-time-greats if you're an all-time-great yourself. It's not about being picky. It's about being someone worth working for.
- Don't hire your friends. Go waaaaay out of your way to hire the best in the world. You won't be able to recruit them until you're the best yourself.
- When recruiting, you should pitch the talent, not them pitch you. If they are pitching you, then you're hiring the low hanging fruit. Work hard for your talent. Find yourself in a position where you are pitching **every person you hire** because you recognize that they could work anywhere else.
- Hire quickly, fire quickly. The #1 greatest mistake any great founder makes is waiting too long to fire bad people. It takes a lot of humility to recognize you made a bad hire and a bad decision.
- Don't just hire people who are passionate about your goal; hire people who are actually good at what they do, too. You can't build a school by hiring only teachers. You need architects and engineers too. Your employees don't have to be passionate about your company for the same reasons you are as long as you both want the same result.

20. On building a personal brand:

- Struggling to build a personal brand? Your problem is that you're too complex. Are you the witty brand, the strong motivational brand, the intellectual brand? You can't grow quickly when you're trying to be too many things. Pick something and stick to it long enough for people to recognize you. If you have too many passions, **STILL** just pick one thing and then change to the next thing once you have an audience.

21. On learning from previous generations:

- Your grandparents are theoretically better at social media than you are. They are the ones that invented the handshake, the ones that invented baking you a cake when your grandmother died, the ones that invented the baker's dozen, and asking you questions when you walked into the store. The internet and social media have made it easier and given you an excuse to be less human instead of amplifying and scaling your humanity. The more "Jetsons" that we become, the more the "Flintstones" will win.
- Facebook audience research is something old people would have done. Testing the market. Oldest trick in the book. Don't ignore it, ask people if they like your stuff.
- Great founders are like great farmers, they look for 10% growth every week. They look for the boring things and not the things that get televised. For you, this means hard work, getting clients, billing, delivering a great product. Do this instead of focusing all your time on fundraising, getting rockstar advisors, growing your social media followers, etc.

22. On burning out:

- I was told that you get burnt out from working too hard and what I found in my own experience is that burnout actually comes from failing and things not working. Momentum is really energizing; the lack of momentum is super draining. I find that I have infinite energy to work on things that are working, and almost none to work on things that I either find uninteresting or that are not working. So when you look at successful people and you wonder how they get so much done; it's really all about momentum. Momentum is really energizing, and lack of momentum is really not energizing.

23. On building a support system:

- Be careful, you may think that you have a support system when in reality what you really have is people that hold you down. Those people don't want you to be better than them. It can even be your spouse. They are scared of losing you and losing who you are.

24. Juan's lesson

There are dozens of individuals who I wish I could thank for loving me into who I am today. This is my own lesson over the last year:

Stay grateful for what brought you here; stay guilty for the responsibility of what's to come.

Gratefulness will give you the optimism necessary to persevere through adversity. Guilt of not maximizing what you've been given will protect you from becoming complacent.

It's easy to overlook the sacrifices and effort needed to bring you to where you are in life.

Don't overlook those things; they're a gift.

Show us all what *you* do with it.