

Shifting Gears

A Young Entrepreneur's Drive

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ISBN: 9798490445944

DEDICATION

To Chandru Thatha

NOTE TO READERS

All incidents and characters in this book are rooted in real life and are products of the author's own experiences and memories. All names besides those of the author and his family, however, are products of the author's imagination and do not match the real names of their respective characters.

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Prologue

Spur: Debate Rounds and Dropouts

Before we begin, let me get something straight: I didn't start my company in a garage. I know, I know, you're disappointed, and who can blame you? If you've watched movies like *Big Hero 6* or *Back to the Future*, if you've heard of Apple or Google or Microsoft or Amazon, you know that *any* entrepreneur is born out of a garage.

But that's the thing—I'm not "any entrepreneur." I'm just a kid. Your average teenage boy. Not that famous businessman who quit his job to start a multimillion-dollar company after an amazing idea arbitrarily and rather unrealistically popped into his head one night and allowed him to change the world in a matter of hours. No—this is a story about the hard reality of the lean startup, the life and drive of the typical kidpreneur who may or may not reach success. This is a story about entrepreneurship at its very core.

And it goes all the way back to middle school.

In sixth grade, I joined my school's public forum debate team, and I had to write a LOT of speeches. The European refugee crisis, the terror attacks in Paris, America's military presence in Okinawa—I don't think there was a single news headline in 2015 that *didn't* pop up in one of my debates.

So, naturally, I started reading the newspaper every morning. Every day before school, I would wake up at 6 a.m., wriggle into my flip-flops, and head down the driveway to grab the daily. I thought my favorite section would be the technology column, but after a while, reading the

news had turned into drudgery.

The first few articles had been about random tech-related current events: Apple vs. FBI, the explosion of a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket containing a Facebook satellite—all complex, outlandish technological gibberish. But one headline was different: for starters, the picture on the cover was of a kid about my age.

Flipping to the next page, I began reading about Botangle, a company founded by a young Idahoan only fifteen years old—just 4 years older than me at the time! After investing his birthday money—a couple hundred dollars from his grandma—into Bitcoin only to sell it for a hundred grand less than two years later, he dropped out of high school to develop an online educational platform for students struggling with the conventional homogeneity of school curricula. Appalled yet slightly intrigued by the thought of a teenager dropping out of school to pursue his entrepreneurial dreams, I continued reading, my mind lost in fantasies of creating my own company.

Through experiences like those, I conjectured a rather rudimentary theory of being an entrepreneur: envision an idea, make it a reality, and then sit and wait for the money and fame to build up. It was with that convenient, elementary, and indubitably fallacious philosophy that I entered the multifaceted realm of entrepreneurship.

In case you're wondering, the first word of every chapter title is the name of a specific kind of gear, which relates to the content of the chapter. For instance, this prologue is tied to spur gears, which are easy to use and widely adopted—emphasizing the commonly preconceived notions about entrepreneurship that we so easily fall victim to—and they come in various shapes and sizes, just like entrepreneurs themselves.

Chapter 1

Shifter: Potato Chips and Possibilities

Since our inception in early 2017, Zigantic’s core mission has been to facilitate the democratization of technology—in other words, to help make tech accessible to all. From building a stock trading simulator geared towards kids to supplying independent game developers with low-cost playtesting (game testing) feedback, we’ve stayed true to that goal of providing our customers with access to tech, resources, and knowledge that they previously couldn’t obtain. I’ve come to realize that the decision my team and I made three years ago to cater our playtesting services to indie game developers, a “mere 35% of the video game industry”—a decision that customers, mentors, and business partners alike have frequently criticized us for—is the sole reason why Zigantic is arguably the first and only company tailored to the underdogs of the game dev market. And that decision to focus on the underdogs wasn’t just professional—it was personal, too.

I was ten years old during my first trip to my grandparents’ house in India (or at least, the first trip I was old enough to remember). I don’t recall much of the flight there, but given my age, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to deduce that it almost certainly encompassed *Phineas and Ferb* and a

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