

Why every startup founder needs a flexible business strategy

In high school, I had a brilliant philosophy teacher called Dr. Green. He was that teacher who everyone wanted to be in his class, and for good reason. We were discussing intelligence and how you sense whether someone is intelligent. Dr Green said “the most intelligent people are the ones who change their mind”, and as always, Dr. Green was right.

Change and adaptability are key to growth

As you experience new ideas or discover new pieces of information, the most intelligent people aren't rigid in their thinking, but constantly give weight to new input. The antithesis of this is being extremely rigid – the person who won't change their mind no matter what.

So why, of all the different ways to understand intelligence, did Dr Green pick adaptability – and how on earth is this meant to help you with business strategy? Because being adaptable is the key to growth, in both life and business.

Those who can accept their ignorance and use it as a lesson to make better choices are the ones who will thrive.

You can assume but you don't know

After Eric Ries released *The Lean Startup*, it developed a cult following and became the bedrock product methodology for startups all over the world. Its key premise is, you know absolutely nothing and the only way to know something is by doing it (cheaply) and seeing what happens. In your maths class, you'd call it trial and error.

The reason this has been so powerful for startups is that, time and time again, our assumption about what we *think* people want is completely different to what people *actually* want. So if you start from believing you know exactly what people want, design a strategy, and things fail – you won't understand why it's failing, because you'll not even realise that a foundational assumption you made was wrong. After all, you believe it to be unshakeable knowledge.

This type of mindset is a surefire way to build products people don't want to use. As founders, we have to accept our ignorance about our business strategy and be ready to change it as new data and information come in at a moment's notice.

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Your environment is ever-changing

The second reason business leaders need to be flexible is because the environment in which they operate is constantly changing. The world, your competitors, technology, advertising, media – it's all changing every second of every day- and none faster than in the tech sector.

I was recently at my parents' house for my dad's 60th birthday and I was hit with reminders of the technology of yesteryear. The radio – which I can't even select my own music? TV with a schedule, not on demand? Within less than 10 years, our lives have changed so rapidly that the technology we grew up with

has become obsolete. If you expect your business to last longer than 3 years, the world in which you started it is going to be completely different from the world you'll occupy in a few years.

When the winds of change blow, some of us build walls and some of us build windmills. Now, you can't possibly comprehend how the world will change in 5 or 10 years. But you can stay light on your feet, keep a pulse on the changes as early on as possible, and courageously adapt to neutralise threats and capitalise on opportunities. If you don't, then somebody else will. If you want to know what that feels like you can ask Blockbuster or Kodak.

In the end, intelligence – personal or business – is about how open we are to ideas and how we can use those ideas to create a clearer sense of the world around us and seize opportunities. The most intelligent academics, entrepreneurs, and innovators can picture the world differently from how it is today because they believe everything they know could be wrong, which means anything could be possible.

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