

How founders can survive the post-accelerator cliff

After participating in an accelerator programme, many founders face what has come to be known as the 'post-accelerator cliff'. They're surrounded by their peers and mentors one moment. The next, they're out in the cold, experiencing the harsh reality of life as an entrepreneur.

Temps de lecture : minute

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This cliff has only become more daunting to leap off in the current economic climate, where investor funding may not flow so freely as it did before the pandemic – now over three years ago. So, what can founders do to make sure that, when they inevitably reach that cliff, they fly, instead of plummet?

What happens after I finish the programme?

The first thing that founders should do to prepare for the post-accelerator cliff comes before they even apply for a programme. That's because the programme itself will, in large part, dictate their post-accelerator experience. Not all accelerators are equal in this respect. Some offer full post-grad experiences. Others offer nothing at all.

It's important that founders thoroughly research what each programme offers. Here are several elements, which the best programmes will offer their participants:

- Free post-accelerator training programmes: by this I don't mean downloadable e-books, but rather online programmes that teach

important skills and processes, like raising money for a seed round, which they may not have been ready to learn while participating in the accelerator itself.

- Partnerships with important services: these should enable preferential rates for graduates with cloud service providers and other similar companies. This is an easy win that Techstars graduates often forget about.
- Networking events: these might include forums, where graduates can learn about important topics of the moment and mingle with their peers. They can use these to meet people who may not have been on their own specific intake.
- Mentorship: post-accelerator mentorship is a significant element that can make a huge difference to a graduate founder's experience. Through this, they'll be able to access guidance in areas which they may lack expertise in, like HR when their company begins to grow.

The kinds of post-accelerator benefits that a founding team needs will vary. There's no definitive list that every programme must tick off. Rather, founders should consider what they need for their business: relevant investors? A local network of peers? Expertise in technology? They should then value accelerator programmes accordingly. And most importantly, they mustn't forget to use them once they've left!

Engaging with an accelerator's network

The second thing I would advise all founders to do after leaving an accelerator programme is to engage with its network. That doesn't just mean alumni, but also the investors and mentors connected in some shape or form. Some accelerators, including Techstars, will have structured ways to do this, like Discord servers and community groups where founders can communicate with one another. These are, essentially, unlimited sources of advice for founders, who would do well to make use of them in that period following the end of an accelerator.

That said, it's important to remember that the best communities operate on a 'give first' principle. Founders should aim to share their knowledge and expertise before seeking to withdraw it from others. This might be as simple as offering tickets to an important tech conference, or providing the contact details of a relevant investor. Behaving in this way means that these networks will always have a rich supply of guidance and advice coming out of them. And, inevitably, when a founder does need some help for themselves, it will be there for them.

Ultimately, founders must recognise that accelerators do not offer some magic potion for success. Yes, they'll give founders an 'unfair advantage' over others who haven't participated in one. But they'll still need to do most of the legwork themselves. A good accelerator will tell them which way to go, what they'll need along the way, and maybe guide them through some of the toughest parts of the journey. The hard work still needs to be done.

When founders come to face the post-accelerator cliff, they should have set themselves up as well as possible using the resources available to them. They must not forget about the continued support provided by the accelerator. The rest is on them to make the most out of.

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