

nuvem  **9**

**ARE YOU
SUITED TO
WORK IN A
STARTUP?**

NIALL MCGINNITY

Do you have what it takes to work in a startup?

Working with the staff in many startups gives Nuvem9 perspective on what characteristics are necessary to successfully progress in a startup venture. We come across a wide range of personalities amongst the personnel working within our startup clients. Startup founders are generally positive, forward thinking people. But what personal characteristics are most common in those succeeding as a startup employee working to deliver the founder's vision?

THE STARTUP EMPLOYEE MUST SHOW HIGH LEVELS OF DEDICATION

“There are no traffic jams along the extra mile” – Roger Staubach

Quite simply, working in a startup is hard work. If your desire is to work in a 9 to 5 environment with a closely defined job description then that's fine – but you probably aren't suited to be a startup employee. A successful startup employee is happy to take on a wide range of responsibilities, often working crazy hours to push the business forward. This dedication is essential on two fronts.

Firstly, having a group of people prepared to go the extra mile ensures that productivity increases without having to spend valuable funds on extra staff. However, more importantly, the devotion to the Company is essential in dealing with the pressures that comes from family commitments, external funders and the wider market.

A STARTUP EMPLOYEE MUST BE PASSIONATE ABOUT YOUR PRODUCT

“Passion is one great force that unleashes creativity, because if you're passionate about something, then you're more willing to take risks” – Yo-Yo Ma

After the Founders themselves, the first startup employees will share a common passion for the product and a strong desire to change and disrupt their target market. This passion leads to excitement and inspiration for their team members, shining through every time you speak to them and disseminating consistently into the Company vision and messaging. And, as the quote above states, the higher the passion for the product, the further you will push yourself to take risks to bring your product to market. It is important though that the driving force

behind the passion is for the business and the product and not just the money that could potentially be made if the start-up is acquired in the future. Personal gain can certainly be an additional factor in maintaining a team's overall passion for a product and/or Company.

However, if it's the sole or main reason for anyone to work in a startup, then eventually that desire will dwindle as other potentially more attractive opportunities present themselves elsewhere. For these people the grass will always look greener elsewhere.

A STARTUP EMPLOYEE MUST BE NATURALLY OPTIMISTIC

“A person who never made a mistake, never tried anything new”

Albert Einstein

Working in a startup is a bit like taking the world's biggest rollercoaster every morning. You can reach unbelievable heights of excitement when you see things progressing, like a customer buying your product for the first time or an angel investor backing you with much needed capital. However, you will also reach crushing disappointments with rejection from your customers, market and funders ripe and common.

And as you don't have a massive support department to sort out the problems as they arise, you have to drop what you are doing and deal with them. If you don't deal with failure well then don't persecute yourself working in a startup, as you will likely have a breakdown end of week one!

You must be naturally optimistic, a necessity in being able to brush off failures as they arise, and instead immediately focus effort and attention on how the business need to deal with the latest failure and move on stronger for the experience.

THE STARTUP MUST WORK AS A STRONG TEAM

“The person who says it can't be done should not interrupt the person doing it” – Chinese Proverb

Are you a naysayer, always the one saying this can't be done, that can't be done? Do you want to continually debate and critique the work of others? Nothing drags

the momentum of a startup more than a negative personality in the team. Teams in startups are normally small, generally less than 5 people in the early months; a person continually airing negative thoughts can have a much bigger impact than in larger organisations, and really start to sour relations.

To succeed in a startup, you must ensure that you air and vocalise your opinions in a positive and proactive manner, and ensure that whatever the forum, it doesn't delay the overall aim – to bring the best version of the product to market as early as possible.

THE EMPLOYEE CAN DEAL WITH FEAR

**“You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great”
– Zig Ziglar**

We speak to people with great ideas all the time but quite often that's all they are – an idea. When we ask what they want to do next we see their fear in making the next step. It could be a fear of losing the income from their job to startup a Company. It could be a fear of what people will say about their idea. It could even be a fear of failing.

The point is that everyone who has ever started a business has also had these thoughts. However, instead of allowing their fear to stop their business before it even starts, they deal with it head on and use it as a driving force to prove themselves and others wrong. It also means that you develop into someone who sees the unknown as a challenge and thrives on the challenges that this brings. From the employee's perspective, they need to have this strength of leadership demonstrated; they are in fear of different things and generally it amounts to will they get paid that month. For the employee fear can be a distraction and it is essential that Founders surround themselves with employees of the same strength of mind, mentality and ethos.

FOCUS

“I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced 1 kick 10,000 times” – Bruce Lee

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Some of the characteristics we have outlined earlier in this article can also bring some issues. For example, a really passionate person may see more and more opportunities as they get deeper into their startup. They will say “We could repurpose the product and start selling it into this new sector” or “We could sign up with this reseller and start selling it in this country”.

The ideas keep coming. The problem is, while all the ideas are great on paper, trying to address them all at once means you end up doing 10 things badly. A successful startup employee will focus on one thing, nail it, start on the next, nail it, and so on. The ability to bring focus to your own work and your team’s work will ensure that the startup itself succeeds earlier.

Let us know what you think and if you have any thoughts on other things that are important to be a successful startup employee.

Nuvm9 specialise in bringing solutions to startups, including advice and assistance in raising capital, go to market strategies and implementing cost effective systems that can scale rapidly.

Contact us via the contact form below to set up a free consultation.

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