Twitter Thread by Suhail



Suhail
@Suhail

1/ The first 18 months of starting a company is often life or death. I must've made 5 different companies that each failed within 9 mo. ■ Each time the company failed I figured out what I could do better. Eventually startup #6 got to $40K/mo by month 18. Here’s what I learned...

2/ Stay focused! Ignore things that are a waste of time: meetups & conferences, meetings with no clear agenda, fundraising if you're not fundraising, reading lots of tech media articles, etc. Every week should feel like significant progress in the first year.

3/ Your first 5 hires will be the difference between life or death. Choose carefully. Be picky. Many of the things we do at the company still are a result of those early hires' legacy. Have fun as a tight knit team. It will change & evolve as you get bigger so enjoy this moment.

4/ Growth may be flat for the first 9 months. It's gonna be okay. Almost every company has experienced this: Airbnb had to sell cereal in-between, Slack failed as a gaming company first, Tesla sold only 147 cars after 6 years! You probably won't be an overnight success either.

5/ In the beginning, do customer support yourself. You will learn a lot about why your product sucks. I did 5,000+ support tickets when it was the two of us. Delight customers & fix things fast while you learn. It will help you build an amazing intuition about your customers.

6/ If your competitor made something your customers love: remove your ego & build it. But, make sure you understand why. Don't blindly copy things either. Learn why first. This was invaluable for me & helped us win critical battles over the years. Nobody cares who built it first.

7/ Positioning matters. Spend time figuring out how to explain your product. If it's easy to do, figure out how to explain why it's different as simply as possible. If not, keep experimenting. We bombed this in the first year. It can often be the diff between success & failure.

8/ Your mantra should be: "Be scrappy." Save money. Don't waste. Ignore status. Focus on building. Make people think you're bigger than you are. Do things the larger company won't do because they move slow. You don't need ping pong tables to win, you need grit & resourcefulness.

9/ Pick roles as co-founders to divide & conquer. You both can't be in charge of all engineering, product, design, & business decisions. This often blows up companies! Debate vigorously but make a call. Opt to test ideas vs throw them away though--especially if it's cheap to do.

10/ Truth is, you're going to be using your gut a lot because you lack data. To compensate: talk to customers, meet people who will play a devil's advocate, & understand the tech from 1st principles. Meet people live tho. It will make a meaningful difference in what you'll learn.

11/ Research the history of your market. It will help you identify old & long-standing assumptions, challenging obstacles you too will face, and critical features it took old players a decade to realize to build. I failed to do this until we were 6 years in & it hurt us.

12/ If you have bad customer retention, you're probably not ready to scale the company. Fix that first, then focus on growth. The #1 reason I've seen 100s of companies fail is by becoming addicted to a clever distribution strategy before their product was good. It's a trap!



13/ If this is your 1st time, consider something like @ycombinator. Having a crew of ppl to commiserate w/ in the early days can help you overcome existential moments. During the '09 recession, we all struggled to raise money. Going through it together made us more resilient. ■

14/ Stay laser focused on solving a narrow set of problems. I failed to do this around the 18 mo mark & got behind because shiny new things excited me. It hurt us & we lost customers. We spent the next 2 years focused on 3-4 major things & significantly surpassed our competitors.

15/ Finally, realize that this is one of the most exciting phases: building the company from scratch. Figuring out what works & what doesn't. Building things that haven't existed. You're starting to cement your company culture too. Have fun, excerise, & take a pic of the team ■.

If you haven't read it already, here are lessons I learned when becoming "CEO" for the first time: https://t.co/m77U25VDbg

1/ I became "CEO" at 20. I dropped out of college. I had only interned somewhere prev. Looking back, I couldn't imagine the journey that would occur from writing code all day to scaling to 300 people. I got lucky, I screwed up a lot, & had a lot of help. Here's what I learned...

— Suhail (@Suhail) May 21, 2018