

5 Entrepreneurs Worth Admiring

Presented by Rami Reda



The Next 'Somebody'

Entrepreneurship is not about trying to be the next 'somebody'. It is about pursuing your vision and contributing something new to the world. New start-ups often glare into the images of elite entrepreneurs envious of their success and vow to follow in their footsteps.

Let me tell you, don't bother. Inspiring entrepreneurs should be people you look to for creative problem solving, individual courage, guidance and a willingness to be different. They are not in it for the flashy label, they are living out their passion. That is where you should be.

Entrepreneurial heroes don't need to be conventional but should offer essential lessons to those savvy enough to take note. My heroes are those whom I have been able to learn from or have influenced my business opinion.



Mohammed Reda

My Dad, Mentor, Teacher and Friend

My dad, knowingly or not, cultivated the perfect environment for my own entrepreneurial tendencies. He was courageous, unapologetic and undeterred by obstacles.

He and my mum opened the doors of the first Big Bee Convenience Store back in 1996 after fleeing the strife and risks of Lebanon. Everything would indicate his business would fail from the lack of English, the move to a new community, the experience within the industry. However, none of that mattered.

What mattered was the vision and bravery.



Mohammed Reda

My dad set up his store to provide a life for his children. Nothing motivates more than that. The lack of English pales as an obstacle in comparison to the force of courage that is parenthood.

But it wasn't just courage that drove success – it was smart decision making at the right time too. He infused Big Bee into the community by sponsoring events, learning English with customers, and then capitalizing on momentum.

Even while Big Bee was continuing to grow, he would reset goals . As he let ambition drive the ship; he opened more stores and later set up Netconnect ATM. Netconnect ATM would prove highly successful and would be purchased by the largest white label ATM company in the world.

By constantly looking to do and be more, my Dad got to the position he finds himself in now – a serial entrepreneur and who opened and licensed 50+ stores and created Netconnect ATM.

To me he exemplified achievable goal setting, astute decision making, unrelenting ambition and above all, bravery.





Aaron Levie

CEO of Box

Aaron Levie is the CEO of Box and the definition of a bootstrapping entrepreneur.

At 35, Levie has already carved out a 16-year career that impacts 40% of the Fortune 500. He is an icon, an inventive thinker and an investor.

Aaron Levie started Box out of his parents' home in Mercer, Washington just shy of his 20th birthday. He found the idea based on a business project that showed a disjointed cloud management market.

Soon after he built up his cloud storage company and began targeting an underserved business market all still attending classes at the University of Southern California. He was a junior at the time with about one year to go before he would graduate to a world of optimistic career prospects.





Aaron Levie

CEO of Box

However, one cold e-mail to Mark Cuban set a chain reaction worthy of a movie.

Levie emailed Mark Cuban to pitch his company as a topic for the popular blogmaverick. Cuban was intrigued and gathered as much information as he could. Without meeting the Box CEO, still working out of his parent's house, he offered an investment of a couple hundred thousand dollars.

Graciously accepting, Levie and his friend and new CFO, Dylan Smith, dropped out of university to give Box their full attention. What impresses me is that he didn't wait. Just one year later, he would have a safety net but he didn't wait. The opportunity was then and there in 2005 and if he didn't act right away, it would be too late.





Aaron Levie

CEO of Box

So many confusing and intimidating factors face entrepreneurs causing many to freeze. Aaron Levie is not one of those. He recognized the need to take opportunities but still had the wisdom to not rush building his company. One of his biggest takeaways was to learn to let go of different tasks as Box grew.

“Starting up is the act of doing as many jobs as possible so your company can survive. Scaling is the act of shedding as many jobs as possible so your company can survive.”

Every opportunity offered; he had the mettle and nerve to take. None of the “I don’t belong here”, “I can’t drop out” or “What will my parents say?” thoughts derailed him. He just went for it.





Jay Z

Life-Long Entrepreneur

“I’m not a businessman, I am a business, man!”

To the underappreciative, Jay-Z is a well-known rapper married to Beyonce. To those familiar with his career, he is a serial entrepreneur, elite businessman and investor.

The thing most people miss about is that Jay-Z has been an entrepreneur since his career began in the early 1990s. While society may not value him selling CDs out of the trunk of his car, it was a beginning.

Jay-Z exudes the ability to turn failure on its head. When he couldn’t get a record deal, he started Roc-A-Fella Record which produced his first album and Kanye West’s first six albums. This paved the way to distribution deal with Def Jam for his album In My Lifetime which came out after the death of his close friend, Notorious B.I.G..



Jay Z

Life-Long Entrepreneur

“For most, a successful music career is enthralling enough but not Shawn Carter. His music was just the origins of business forays to be followed by several start-ups and investments.

His clothing brand Rocawear achieved \$700 million in annual sales by the early 2000s before he sold on. Roc Nation, his entertainment company represents Rihanna, Shakira, DJ Khaled, T.I. and Big Sean. Roc Nation Sports Management handles career matters for Kevin Durant, Dez Bryant and Todd Gurley. His sale of Ace of Spades is to net him in the region of \$300 million. His 40/40 Club has 6 upmarket locations overall and streaming service Tidal, which he bought for \$56 million, is valued at \$600 million today.





Jay Z

Life-Long Entrepreneur

Jay-Z has an extraordinary hunger for entrepreneurial growth and the eye for opportunity to match. His knack for writing down ideas for rhymes as a teenager flourished into never missing a beat as an adult.

Few careers and entrepreneurs can boast that level of transferable success but if there's anything you can learn from Jay-Z, it's that: with enough hustle, nothing is an obstacle.



LeBron James

Athlete Turned Entrepreneur
Turned Activist

Since before LeBron James even set foot in high school, he was becoming a brand. His successes created a cult like following on his every move from an undefeated St. Vincent / St. Mary's team to the L.A. Lakers and a \$1 billion lifetime deal with Nike.

He has had the glare of the media and the world watching him for over 20 years, yet he's still winning championships – 4 of them with 3 different teams. He breeds success and will always have a place in the GOAT conversation.



LeBron Jame

Athlete Turned Entrepreneur Turned Activist

The most unusual thing is that he has never lost focus. Every step of the way he shows an unsatisfiable will to work, win and lead. He remains steadfast in making long term decisions for his future whether it has been to invest \$1.5 million per year on maintaining his health or the purchase of new businesses. His leadership and influence have even transcended basketball.

LeBron now owns 19 Blaze pizza franchises, SpringHill Entertainment, Uninterrupted, Ladder, his LeBron James Family Foundation and a host of other ventures including building the I Promise School where 90% of students have met or exceeded personal growth goals. For added charm, LeBron even married his high school sweetheart.



LeBron Jame

Athlete Turned Entrepreneur
Turned Activist

Does anyone need anymore proof that he should never shut up and dribble? He is more than an athlete.

Lebron, despite all these commitments and suffering a disjointed childhood, an absent father, weekly often racist attacks and the weight of the world on him for decades, he is still winning rings because his focus never falters.



Marcus Lemonis

People, Process, Profit

Finally, we come to Marcus Lemonis. Like myself he is an ambitious Lebanese-born immigrant.

Marcus Lemonis was abandoned to an orphanage in Beirut 4 days after he was born. This hasn't stopped him from amassing a fortune of \$500 million because he seizes his opportunities.

After working for years in his adoptive grandfather's car dealership, Lemonis was granted the chance to make strides in the business world. His long-time friend partnered with him to disrupt the RV industry.



Marcus Lemonis

With Lemonis as the CEO, they purchased Holiday RV Superstores before going on to acquire and merge with Camping World and Good Sam Enterprises. He was looking to change the whole industry and to build the brand awareness, he chose something near and dear to American hearts, RVs and Nascar.

By sponsoring Nascar events, Camping World was exposed to the perfect target audience. His strategy was so successful, Camping World eventually went public gaining a market value of \$2 billion.

Marcus Lemonis leveraged his exposure to the initially clumsy failings of the RV market to change the industry but he learned something new about himself. He had a taste for fixing high potential but stuttering businesses.



With this new interest, the Profit was built. It wasn't just any reality TV, Lemonis literally put his money where his mouth is and invested in companies he believed in.

Although Lemonis got his start in the automotive industry, his talent was investing and nurturing businesses to become successful. Even now he runs a free learning centre because he believes in people and their passions.

It is the belief of Marcus Lemonis that inspires me most. In his eyes, there are very few businesses that cannot be turned around by the right decision making. He backs himself and his humanity to help struggling companies navigate their way to success and profitability. His life story of success despite adversity is what he offers to the companies he impacts because setbacks are temporary.



In Conclusion

I graduated university in 2007 full of ambition and enthusiasm for the future. I had many plans and the drive to achieve them but, even now 13 years later, I regularly find inspiration in the business leaders of today. I have been blessed to have met and garner what I could from so many inspiring entrepreneurs. Understanding their journey has allowed me to craft my own path of what I define as success.

Each one of these famed entrepreneurs exhibited incredible tenacity, bravery and ability to overcome the barriers in front of them. The common denominators are not the sole recipe to success but provide a glimpse of what you need as an entrepreneur.

You need to be able to persist despite challenges. You need to always be able to find a way. You need to see and take the opportunities that come to you. Before you hitch your wagon to certain heroes, what do they inspire in you? What do they characterize that will help you when you are searching for advice?

