

How Building Tech With No Tech Background Taught Me the Most Valuable Skill in Business

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In today's world, not every founder comes from a technical background, and that's no longer a dealbreaker. With AI projected to grow 28.5% by the end of the decade, even specialists are racing to keep up with emerging innovations. In such a fast-moving environment, the expectation that any one person, founder or otherwise, will master every detail is both unrealistic and counterproductive.

The reality is this: You don't need to code to build in tech, but you *do* need to translate. The ability to connect across disciplines has become the most important skill to develop – not just as someone building a company, but as someone leading one.

If my experience in the NBA has taught me anything, it's that every good team is made up of strong translators: people who understand both the locker room and the boardroom, coaches who can speak to data analysts and players, and leaders who can turn strategy into execution. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what tech startups need, too.

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Clarity beats jargon

When I started building Tracy AI, I quickly learned that trying to sound technical wasn't helpful and actually slowed things down. Translating product decisions into clear, outcome-based language helped us move much faster. We didn't always need to build models from scratch, but we did need to understand what those models were aiming for. That's the real distinction between technical literacy and technical fluency: One is about credibility, but the other is about clarity. When everyone's on the same page, people align, and products get better.

Having this approach enabled us to bring in outside subject-matter experts, test assumptions early and avoid costly missteps that often come from internal echo chambers. Regardless of whether your team is fluent in Python, the ability to communicate clearly across complexity is what ultimately drives the company's momentum.

Hire smart

I once read a quote from David Ogilvy that stuck with me: "Hire people who are better than you are, and then leave them to get on with it." In tech, that means surrounding yourself with brilliant engineers, designers and product minds, and focusing your own energy on alignment, direction and decision-making.

Building a company is about asking better questions, setting the right priorities and making sure your team is rowing in the same direction. That requires trust, communication and discipline, not technical depth. It also means knowing how to translate business needs into technical priorities, and vice versa.

When it comes down to it, a founder's job is to build bridges.

Between vision and execution. Between product and people. Between strategy and reality. The most valuable skill in business isn't your ability to code; it's your ability to connect. Not being afraid of connecting strong, self-motivated individuals in your business is not only a recipe for success – it's just good business sense.

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Letting go

Rapid-growth companies face a specific leadership challenge: knowing when to direct and when to step back. For founders, especially those without technical backgrounds, there's a strong temptation to stay hands-on with every detail. According to a Harvard Business Review study, 58% of founders struggle to let go of control, often remaining stuck in what's known as "founder mode," even when the company is ready to scale.

Being stuck in founder mode can slow down progress, stifle creativity and burn out the very experts hired to build. The job of the founder is to hold the vision and define the "what" and "why," while trusting the team to figure out the "how." That means giving engineers autonomy to explore solutions and trusting their understanding of the mechanics.

At the same time, it's important to stay connected to the people you're building for. From my experience, I made sure to spend time with athletes, coaches and trainers – not just as a former player, but as a product owner committed to learning. That user feedback wasn't just helpful; it became a compass for the tech. Just because we may need to let go of day-to-day, doesn't mean we can't get involved in other ways.

At a certain point in any startup's life, there is a transition from idea to alignment. Engineers speak in sprints

and system architecture. Investors speak in ROI and risk. Users speak in frustrations, workarounds and outcomes. As a founder, your job is to be the connector between all of them, bridging the gap between engineers, users and investors, often speaking three very different languages in the same meeting.

Related: Are You Running Your Business – or Is It Running You? How to Escape ‘Founder Mode’ and Learn to Let Go

That means being able to explain what users actually want to your developers, breaking down technical constraints in a way your investors can understand and communicating a vision clearly enough that everyone in the business can see where they fit in. This is what makes a product usable, turns a group of builders into a team and ultimately transforms a good idea into a lasting company.

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