How Pharmaceutical CEO Bradley Burnam's Relentless Infection Turned Into a Relentless Pursuit for a Cure

This self-taught formulator and regulatory expert grew Turn Therapeutics into a disruptive enterprise with nothing but a credit line, Google and the FDA help desk.

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In this series called Member Showcase, we publish interviews with members of The Oracles. This interview is with Bradley Burnam, founder and CEO of Turn Therapeutics, which is on a mission to render disease obsolete. It was condensed by The Oracles.

Who are you?

Bradley Burnam: I am a healer and a teacher; my company is both my laboratory and classroom. My father was a physician. Growing up, I was inspired by his ability to heal people with his knowledge. Although I have some regrets over not becoming a doctor, my chosen path has permitted me to heal thousands of people via my organization and products. What began as a journey to cure myself has become a relentless pursuit of rendering as many diseases obsolete as time and capital permits.

Share an interesting fact about yourself that not many people would know.

Bradley Burnam: I'm entirely self-educated in chemistry, regulatory issues, and business – you could say I got my MBA the hard way. I was a humanities major at UCLA and then earned my master's degree in education at Stanford. I never took a single college-level chemistry class. However, my lack of formal training became my greatest asset; I did not know what the experts had deemed "impossible," which gave me the freedom to experiment without expecting failure.

How did your business get started?

Bradley Burnam: Turn Therapeutics birthed from my own health crisis. I acquired a severe, drug-resistant skin infection while making hospital rounds as a medical device salesperson, requiring over a dozen reconstructive surgeries over several years. With all the advances in modern medicine, I was exasperated that nothing could heal me.

So, I endeavored to develop my own cure, turning my home into a research and development (R&D) lab in the process. I conducted and self-funded our first two successful FDA clearances with nothing but a credit line, Google, and the FDA help desk. Then, I flew nearly one million miles as a one-man salesforce to generate demand. I de-risked our business before ever seeking outside investment.

What's your favorite quote?

Bradley Burnam: The diplomat James Bryce said, "Medicine, the only profession that labors incessantly to destroy the reason for its existence." This is how I run my company: We should seek incessantly to destroy the diseases and the reasons for people needing our products.

What was your biggest, most painful failure?

Bradley Burnam: When starting out as a naive entrepreneur, I impulsively signed a contract with a "Trust me, we'll just amend it later" pitch. I learned that contracts are written

for business divorces, not business marriages – and I needed to surround myself with people who balance my occasionally delusional optimism.

How do you define great leadership?

Bradley Burnam: Be equally aware of your shortcomings and strengths; surround yourself with people who balance your shortcomings while focusing your energy on perfecting your strengths. Hire for character over credentials.

How do you evaluate a good business deal?

Bradley Burnam: I need to see an obsessive founder or partner with similar values, an executable plan, and capital efficiency. I cannot deal with inefficiencies that ultimately get passed down to consumers via higher prices.

Which single habit gives you 80% of your results?

Bradley Burnam: My lack of formal training presented a credibility issue when I was starting in business. I overcame this by creating safe, effective products and obtaining the requisite regulatory approvals myself. I did the work that nobody thought I could do, then offered a piece of the results to investors after the risk of reaching the market was gone, not before.

The lesson? Focus your endeavors on what you love and why you love it, and don't let any lack of formal training stop you. Pick up a book to learn the skills you need. Being relentless and resilient has given me 80% of my results.

What are you working on right now?

Bradley Burnam: We have transitioned from start-up to stay-up, and major pharmaceutical executives are joining our mission. We recently closed our Series B funding and have commenced large-scale clinical trials, including one for our FDA-cleared eczema formula. We have also recently joint ventured with one

of the world’s largest cosmetic companies to clean up nail salons by upgrading professional-use products to prevent infection during manicures and pedicures.

What do you want to be known for, or what do you want your legacy to be?

Bradley Burnam: The founder who reminded everyone that there is nobility left in pharma.

Connect with Bradley on LinkedIn, and learn more about Turn Therapeutics here.

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