

# How to Filter Good Advice From The Bad

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With so much information available, someone could easily think that building a successful startup should be easy. In reality, such an overwhelming amount of advice makes it more challenging. CB Insights found that 70% of upstart tech companies fail within 20 months, which I suspect – may be (in part) – is because they take generic advice and apply it without consideration of their individual circumstances.

Most startup founders find themselves drowning in a sea of advice that pulls them in every direction. Being a founder is already tough enough, and taking in and adopting so much information makes it easy to get overwhelmed, but that doesn't mean you can't succeed on your own terms.

By acknowledging the fact that they are on their own path and finding their unique “why,” startup founders can filter out the good advice from the fluff on their entrepreneurial journey with confidence and keep their business afloat.

## Focus on the founder

In a world full of overwhelming advice, startup founders need clarity and guidance tailored to the biggest driver of their business's success: themselves. We all differ in skill sets, strengths, weaknesses, and past wounds. Every founder is fighting both business and personal battles that intertwine and are impossible to separate.

Who we are as individuals and why we become entrepreneurs

affects everything we do: Our leadership, the people we do business with and employ, how we sell and who we turn to to raise money. Despite the magnitude of information out there to help budding entrepreneurs, unless the advice reflects the unique circumstances of the founder, most of it won't apply to them. Without this guidance, it would be impossible for a founder to decipher the right advice to apply based on their leadership.

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## Identify the “why”

To apply the right advice, startup founders first need a deep and clear understanding of their “why” – the *real* reason they became entrepreneurs in the first place. We can only reach our goals if we know our reasons for setting them, just like we can't keep a customer happy unless we know what they really want. Everyone has their own path fueled by what they want, but as founders, we need to identify exactly what that path is and what drives us down it. This is not a personal mission statement. This is our unique truth.

To identify our “why” and the source of our passion, we need to be honest. Remember that any and all “whys” are okay, even if the reason sounds selfish, as long as they're driving us forward.

- Did your old job frustrate you and make it unbearable to live with?
- Do you want to be rich or famous?
- Are you so passionate about a problem you want to solve that it dominates your thoughts?

By pinpointing exactly what it was that pushed us to become entrepreneurs, we can let that underlying “why” keep driving us.

A friend of mine, a founder and amazing CEO, was just starting out and struggling to get in front of the right customers and gain the traction and funding she needed. When I suggested she bring in sales help, she said, “It’s supposed to be founder-led sales for your first 10 customers.” Maybe. But not for her.

I told her to reflect on her “why” – which she had identified as having the goals of being a great leader, a passionate advocate, and a builder of incredible products – and she realized that the advice about founder sales wasn’t applicable. She started to build her business around her core strengths and hired around her weaknesses. One salesperson, many big customers, and multiple funding rounds later, her company is well-known and growing. Honesty, reflection, and knowledge of her “why” led to her success.

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## Asking the right questions

After establishing our “why,” the next steps are an uphill battle. Under the revealing lights of why we began our entrepreneurship, we can feel tempted to hide from the flaws we discover. I know I was. No one likes everything they see when they look in the mirror. But only through these unflinching assessments can we identify our pain points – these will lead us to the advice we need to address them.

Fortunately, others have been in our shoes and experienced our problems. In fact, most of the questions we face in a startup – how to raise capital or how to stand out in the market – have already been faced before by other founders. Having the knowledge of our “why” as well as an honest reflection of our strengths and weaknesses can help us identify which advice – among a sea of advice – is most applicable to your startup.

Consider:

1. **The advice giver:** Who is the person giving the advice? Does their perspective on entrepreneurship align with yours? Do they face similar personal challenges that impact their company in similar ways?
2. **Personal blocks:** Do you have any biases that might hinder your acceptance of the offered advice? If you could ignore that bias, would the advice be helpful?
3. **The relevance:** Does the advisor have a similar company going through a similar experience? Is their background and arrival at entrepreneurship similar to yours?

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## Everyone evolves

A running business is like a living organism: It evolves, just like we do. Mistakes happen and everyone stumbles at some point along the way, but we can get back up, reorient ourselves, and reach our own unique goals. Continue to evaluate your unique journey to find the right advice and keep you oriented toward success. Instead of putting your feet in someone else's shoeprints, lean into your journey and keep blazing your own trail.

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