‘You Are Somehow a Villain If You Use It’: Tons of Music Producers Are Secretly Using AI, New Study Reveals

Readers of a certain age are acutely aware of the wild ride the music industry has been on over the past few decades — from vinyl to cassettes to CDs to mp3s to streaming, the way we listen to (and buy) music has changed dramatically.

And now, with the advent of AI, the way that music is created has experienced a seismic shift, as well. And as much change that we’ve seen in recent years, we haven’t seen anything yet, says Helmuts Bems, CEO of studio monitor and headphone calibrating company Sonarworks.

Related: ‘We Do Not Allow Lazy Money to Have Control’: How This Music Company Unlocked Creativity for Its Team Members

Bems’ company recently conducted a wide-ranging study called AI in the Music Industry — Should You Fight It, Ignore It, or Embrace It? Based on interviews with more than 100 industry professionals and music consumers, the goal of the study was to take a snapshot of where the industry is now so that those working in it can “be better prepared for what’s to come.”

Here are Bems’ thoughts on what the study’s data reveals about the current state and future of music.

Entrepreneur: What findings were you surprised by from your study?
Helmuts Bems: For me, the biggest surprise was just how

widespread the use of AI tools already is in the professional music industry. Those on the frontlines who have to meet deadlines for commercial projects have mostly tested AI systems and have found them to be helpful. There were many anecdotes about artists submitting AI-generated songs as their own and labels not being able to detect them. Everybody thinks that it gives them a professional edge, and maybe rightly so. However, the most surprising is that these same people do not want to publicly talk about it. The consensus is that AI is an extremely potent technology and already very, very good at creating content, however, you are somehow a villain if you use it.

What were the biggest disruptions in the music industry in prior decades to AI's ascent?
Here are two massive disruptions that stand out. In the '90s, CDs replaced tape recordings as a format. CDs brought more focus on album releases and, interestingly, enabled skipping songs. CDs also brought a lot of economic benefits as they were cheaper to produce but were sold for more than tapes. They also created a recording revolution as digital editing became an inherent part of the production/creative process.

Related: Cheap Trick's Legendary Guitarist Rick Nielsen Invites Fans to Drink — and Invest In — His Award-Winning ROCK'N Vodka

From 2005 to 2020, there was a period of extremely violent industry disruption that ended with the dominance of streaming as the new music consumption standard. This disruption was truly incredible as the industry lost 70% of its CD revenue. Most importantly, streaming has completely changed the rights-based payout structure. Streaming has brought about the age of playlists and singles, replacing the album concept. And it killed the music retail store. But it has brought ever more recording to ever more consumers, inspiring a massive boost in creativity.

How is AI-generated music affecting musicians' ability to make money?

First, let's make the distinction of what is meant by musician. There are many stakeholders in making music: Composers/producers, professional musicians, and hobby musicians.

We believe that producers and composers will be the big winners in the AI era. They will be able to deliver more content than ever, without depending on others to deliver their parts. While commercial musicians may see reduced opportunities in areas like background music or advertising, hobbyists and indie artists will be empowered by AI to create without needing expensive gear or technical training. It enables more people to express themselves musically, but it also floods the market, making it harder for individual artists to stand out or make a sustainable income.

Related: A 74-Year-Old Musician Makes a Million a Year From an Unpopular Song Written Nearly 50 Years Ago. Here's How.

In this new landscape, creativity alone isn't enough — artists must also become curators, strategists, and technologists to thrive. In the long run, I am afraid about the potential for AI to discourage young people to even go into music. If AI gets really good at creating music with a click of a button, it might discourage people to try learning to play an instrument.

We believe pure AI-generated content is the big danger for musicians. The economic shift favors those who adapt — producers, composers, and creators who embrace AI tools to boost their efficiency and output. But it also means that royalties and revenue from streaming and licensing could increasingly go to platforms and AI developers instead of artists.

Where do you see the music industry in one, five, and ten

years?
In 1-3 years, we'll likely still see a hybrid world where AI tools assist creators more than replace them. Vocal and instrument transformation, AI synthesizers, mixing and mastering assistants and AI-assisted ideation will become increasingly common in professional workflows. The conversation around AI rights and licensing will heat up, especially as lawsuits from rights holders against AI companies start influencing legal frameworks.

In five years, assuming a medium disruption scenario, we expect AI-generated content to rival human-generated music in volume and quality. Streaming platforms might increasingly serve algorithmically composed content tailored to individual users in real-time. But we also anticipate a backlash – a demand for human connection, emotional depth, and authenticity. Vinyl could continue its rise, and live shows might become even more experiential and immersive.

By ten years out, real-time AI music generation based on context, like your mood, biometrics, or environment, could be mainstream. To look that far into the future, one must answer deeply psychological questions about human nature and the nature of musical expression. Even though I do believe AI will dominate some areas of the music industry, there will be domains left where humans will still be in charge. I am personally a big fan of live jazz improvisations in a very underground environment. I am convinced that 10 years from now, I will still be able to enjoy these shows, and it will still be humans performing there.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/many-music-producers-are-secretly-using-ai-new-study/490325

What the New IRS Rules Mean for Your Business — And How to Come Out Ahead

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

The IRS is rapidly getting much, much smaller.

In February, the agency laid off roughly 7,000 probationary employees from its 90,000-person workforce as part of the Trump administration's widespread effort to reduce the size of the federal government. Then, in early March, the Associated Press reported that the IRS was drafting plans to cut its staff by as much as 50%.

That's a big change. A cut that big would put IRS staffing at 44% less than it was in 2020 and 60% less than it was in 1995, the IRS Data Book shows.

On top of the staff reduction, the IRS budget is also shrinking. The federal spending bill President Trump signed on March 15 reclaimed $20.2 billion in IRS funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. And technology CEO Sam Corcos, who is working with the Department of Government Efficiency at the IRS, has said as recently as March 20 that billions of dollars' worth of contracts within the agency's budget can be eliminated.

What does this mean for entrepreneurs?

A lot of the specific effects on taxpayers will depend on how the administration and Congress move to reshape the IRS. Still, there are a few facts that can guide you as you make investment and tax-strategy decisions.

Entrepreneurs can worry less about unwarranted audits

This had become a real concern under the Biden administration. The original version of the Inflation Reduction Act included $46 billion earmarked for increased tax enforcement, money the IRS said it planned to use to go after wealthy taxpayers it believed weren't paying what they owed. While the stated goal was to go after tax cheats, in reality, the audit rates on these groups were likely to go up across the board. This seems unlikely as IRS funding drops.

This is especially good news for entrepreneurs who use partnerships. Under the Biden plan, the IRS said it wouldn't increase the audit rates on people earning less than $400,000 per year, focusing instead on partnerships and high earners. Lots of entrepreneurs and investors – including plenty who don't earn $400,000 a year – use partnerships. If this enforcement strategy had continued, these taxpayers were likely to face a greater likelihood of an audit.

Audits are time-consuming, stressful and often costly, even for taxpayers who haven't done anything wrong. In my experience working with thousands of entrepreneurs over the years, the accounting fees during an audit can ran/ge from $10,000 to $30,000, and that's before the cost of increased tax payments, penalties and interest from an adverse finding.

Related: 4 Tax Strategies Every High-Earning Entrepreneur Needs to Know for 2025

Taxpayer support will go from bad to worse, at least temporarily

Taxpayers and tax preparers have been dealing with terrible customer service from the IRS for years.

If you've ever called into the IRS with a question, chances are you sat on hold for ages. The average wait time was 13 minutes in 2023, with just about half (51%) of calls reaching a human. If you're familiar with call center industry standards, you'll be shocked to know that even that low level of service was a big improvement from 2022, when it took more than 28 minutes for the IRS to answer a call on average and just 21% made it through to humans.

Part of the improvement came from the IRS adding thousands of customer service reps at the end of 2022. A large workforce reduction at the agency will likely create a short-term return to long waits for phone assistance. If the IRS continues to modernize, however, it may eventually be able to deliver faster and better-quality service with a smaller staff. Using AI to augment live support, for example, could help taxpayers resolve common questions quickly without ever speaking with a live agent. AI could also allow the IRS to accelerate upgrades to other aspects of its outdated systems, such as processing paper returns and simplifying outdated computer systems.

Related: How to Get the Most Money Out of Your Side Hustle During Tax Season, From an Expert Who Raised $75.2 Million to Make Filing Easier

While the government's move to reimagine the IRS is a positive development for entrepreneurs, it's important not to get complacent. The IRS isn't going away, and neither is the tax code. Every entrepreneur needs to make sure they and their businesses comply with the tax law. But don't pay more than you are required to pay.

Entrepreneurs have access to lots of government tax incentives designed to promote growth and reinvestment. Use them. After all, it's your money. Why not invest it in a way that helps you builde wealth while reducing or eliminating your taxes? The best way to do this is to work with a certified public accountant (CPA) who understands the tax code and will

proactively share ideas to help you become someone the tax law favors. You'll be best served by using the same CPA firm for your tax strategy, tax returns and any audits, should you ever face one.

When choosing a CPA, look for one who isn't afraid of the IRS. If you aren't sure, try asking, "How many IRS audits have you handled? If I get audited, what would you do?" If they don't sound confident, it's time to look for someone else. And for added peace of mind, ask your CPA about putting an audit protection plan in place. Ideally, this is a simple fee added on to the cost of your tax return preparation that will help you avoid the high cost of an audit if you end up facing one.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/money-finance/what-the-new-irs-rules-mean-for-your-business-and-how/489027

The Overlooked Legal Tool That Can Safeguard Your Most Sensitive Business Information

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Confidence, as a legal concept, plays a vital yet often overlooked role in protecting non-public information. Unlike contract-based mechanisms like NDAs, the law of confidence operates independently, offering a flexible and powerful tool

for businesses to safeguard sensitive data.

Confidence is a legal institution in its own right and independent of contract law. This is a critical point, as it means that obligations of confidence do not arise from contractual obligations.

Related: 4 Actions Start-Up Founders Need to Take (But Often Overlook) to Protect Their Business

How confidence differs from other legal protections

What distinguishes the law of confidence from similar legal protections, such as copyright, trademark or patent law, is that confidence is a common law principle, whereas the others are statutory protections. In simple terms, common law is a living body of law that evolves with societal circumstances and may be interpreted – or even overridden – by the courts based on the specifics of each case.

An obligation of confidence is established between persons as soon as one person discloses information to another, where a reasonable person would understand that the information is not publicly accessible.

This obligation may arise explicitly, when the information is shared in a direct conversation, or implicitly, such as when someone becomes aware of the information accidentally. In both cases, the duty of confidence is established between the parties.

As soon as confidence is established between persons, the receiving party must exercise due care to protect the information received, using appropriate means.

What is critical here is that protecting what you disclose to another person does not necessarily require signing a non-

disclosure or even a non-circumvention agreement. As long as your communication is in a form that can be logged and clearly indicates the exchange of non-public information, the obligation of confidence is established between the parties.

The intentional use of the generic term non-public – rather than confidential – serves as a broader and more inclusive notice. It signals to others that they should not limit their attention to information explicitly labeled as confidential, but instead exercise their best judgment in identifying what is not publicly available. This framing encourages a higher standard of due care in handling such information.

An example of when confidence obligations are established implicitly is through a notice included in an email signature.

When your email states that you are communicating non-public information, this notice can create an obligation of confidence – even if the email is received by someone by mistake. In such cases, the recipient is generally expected to delete the message and disregard its contents, thereby fulfilling their duty to mitigate the breach and uphold the established obligation.

Related: Avoid These 6 Mistakes in Safeguarding Proprietary Information

Confidence in business relationships

Entrepreneurs may establish a context of confidence and impose obligations on the other party from a perspective that is both interesting and rarely discussed.

When a business enters into any contractual relationship, a form of confidence should also be established regarding the degree of information it is entitled to access in order to fully benefit from that relationship.

Having access to the appropriate level of information builds confidence and provides the certainty needed to understand what is happening with business partners – especially when those developments may directly impact the relationship.

Confidence obligations are established between parties in a business relationship when their discussions clearly reflect the necessity of exchanging non-public information owned by each party – especially if that information could reasonably impact the relationship and its underlying purpose.

Non-disclosure, non-circumvention and confidence

When we examine the context of confidence from the perspective of non-disclosure and non-circumvention agreements, we find that overlaps often occur. Non-circumvention is particularly critical, as the receiving party of non-public information may attempt to use that information for their own benefit or for the benefit of others.

Using the term "confidence" to establish obligations for non-public information – rather than relying on the term "confidential," which forms the core of NDAs and NCAs – is more reliable as a unilateral act.

While NDAs and NCAs are typically bilateral agreements that require formal acceptance by the receiving party, confidence obligations can be established unilaterally.

These obligations arise when non-public information is disclosed in a manner that reasonably conveys an expectation of privacy and discretion.

In the context of confidence, the receiving party's acceptance is not required for the obligation to be established.

Sometimes, entrepreneurs and businesses may choose to maintain

the information that constitutes their competitive edge as a trade secret, rather than applying for a patent to protect their innovative processes.

The critical difference between a trade secret and a patent is that the underlying information in a patent becomes public, with the aim of encouraging further innovation built upon the patented idea as prior art. In contrast, establishing obligations of confidence is the most appropriate means of preserving the secrecy of valuable informational assets that make a business distinct.

Another critical point is that, while data protection primarily addresses breaches of confidence in personal data and is built upon privacy principles, confidence as a legal concept provides a more general form of protection. It extends to all instances of non-public information, regardless of the type of data or the means through which it is shared.

Related: 5 Situations That Require a Non-Disclosure Agreement

Enforcing confidence and legal implications

In cases involving breaches of confidence, courts heavily rely on the surrounding circumstances to determine whether an obligation of confidence existed. Therefore, it is crucial for entrepreneurs and business executives to implement a rigorous need-to-know policy.

Courts are unlikely to uphold claims of breach of confidence if non-public information was disclosed to someone who had no legitimate need to know it.

In every claim for breach of confidence, the claimant must demonstrate not only that a duty of care was owed to them – by establishing the existence of confidence obligations – but also that this duty was breached, and that the breach resulted

in damage to the claimant.

Understanding and applying the principles of confidence empowers parties to establish obligations even without formal agreements. As legal and business environments evolve, confidence remains a dynamic and reliable means of protecting informational assets and maintaining trust in professional relationships.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/this-overlooked-legal-tool-can-protect-your-most-sensitive/489265

Not All Revenue Is Good Revenue. Here's How Firing Bad Customers Can Save Your Startup.

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Firing a customer. It sounds counterintuitive, especially for startups hungry for revenue and growth. But the truth is, knowing exactly who your customers are — and more importantly, who they aren't — is one of the most critical skills for founders. It's a tough conversation, but sometimes you have to fire a customer to ensure your startup thrives. When a company is young and resources are scarce, every customer seems valuable.

Founders often chase after any paying client, hoping to drive

quick revenue and prove their product's worth. However, as your business matures, it becomes clear that not all customers are beneficial. Some clients require disproportionate resources, constant attention and special treatment, diverting your team's focus and energy away from your strategic goals. These mismatches can not only drain morale but also negatively influence product development, steering your startup away from its core objectives and desired market positioning.

Recognizing these problematic relationships early on and addressing them proactively can be pivotal. While difficult, having the courage and clarity to fire a misaligned customer can liberate your resources, sharpen your company's direction and reinforce a culture of strategic clarity and focus.

Related: 5 Good Reasons to Fire Your Worst Customers

Understanding your ideal customer

When you're building a company, especially in tech, customer feedback is the lifeline of product development. But not all feedback is created equal. Misguided feedback from the wrong customers can lead you astray, diluting your focus, draining resources and potentially steering your product away from its core value.

Think about Dropbox in its early days. Initially, they tried appealing broadly to everyone who needed storage. As they scaled, Dropbox had to focus intensely on their core market: consumers who needed simple, reliable cloud storage. They consciously moved away from enterprise customers who demanded heavy customization and extensive support, effectively firing these less compatible customers. The move allowed Dropbox to streamline resources and cater to the mass consumer market more efficiently. Today, they're dominant precisely because they knew when to say no.

Another prime example is HubSpot. In the early stages, HubSpot

accepted nearly any customer interested in inbound marketing solutions. But as the company grew, it realized some customers required disproportionate resources, continually pushed for features outside its core offering and diverted the product roadmap. By intentionally narrowing its customer profile, HubSpot improved service quality, enhanced product focus and grew sustainably. Firing mismatched customers didn't just protect their product — it clarified their brand.

When and how to fire a customer

So, how do you decide when to fire a customer? Start by identifying your ideal customer profile. The closer you align your product with a specific customer's needs, the more efficiently you can grow. Customers outside this core profile — those who drain resources, misalign with your strategic vision, or generate minimal profit — often cause more harm than good.

You might hesitate because revenue is revenue, right? But revenue from the wrong customers has hidden costs. They monopolize your team's time with special requests and constant support needs. They can lead your product astray by demanding features that don't serve your broader market. Long-term, this toxic revenue can harm your growth trajectory.

Firing a customer isn't negative — it's about reclaiming focus. Consider Evernote. At its peak, Evernote was beloved by users who relied heavily on note-taking simplicity. As they expanded, they attempted to cater to power users, adding complicated features that confused their core base. The backlash was swift. Ultimately, Evernote had to reverse course, refocusing on its primary customer base and removing distractions. Had they identified and gracefully exited from demanding customers earlier, they might have avoided costly missteps.

When firing a customer, honesty and clarity are key. Explain

why their needs no longer align with your company's direction. Suggest alternative solutions or providers that might serve them better. Customers respect transparency, even if the conversation is difficult. By proactively managing your customer base, you protect your company's culture, product vision and long-term growth.

Related: 5 Reasons to Fire a Customer — Plus 5 Steps to Take Before You Do

Looking forward

As a founder, your responsibility isn't just to gain customers — it's to gain the right customers. You're not just chasing numbers; you're building a sustainable, profitable and impactful company. When you have the courage to fire customers who no longer fit, you're reinforcing your company's clarity, sharpening your product focus and ultimately positioning your startup for greater success.

Knowing who your customers aren't can be just as valuable as knowing who they are. Remember, customer focus isn't about pleasing everyone — it's about passionately serving the right audience. By learning from companies like Dropbox, HubSpot and Evernote, startups can better navigate the delicate process of customer alignment. Firing a customer might seem uncomfortable today, but it could be exactly what your startup needs to thrive tomorrow.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-firing-bad-customers-can-save-your-startup/489474

Meta Is Testing AI That Can Catch Teenagers Trying to Get Around Age Rules on Instagram

Meta is now using AI to automatically determine whether an Instagram account belongs to a teen user.

The tech giant announced on Monday that it is starting to test AI in the U.S. that detects if an Instagram account belongs to a teen. It doesn't matter if the account lists an adult birthday – if Meta's AI detector suspects that the account belongs to a teen, Meta will recategorize the Instagram account as a specific Teen Account with protective settings and limits.

"Parents are busy and don't always have the time to review these settings," Meta wrote in a blog post. "That's why we're continuing to take additional steps to ensure as many teens as possible are in Teen Account settings."

Meta stated that users would have the option to change their settings if Meta's AI mistakenly classifies an adult account as a Teen Account.

Related: Meta Is Reportedly Working on Smart Glasses With a Screen – at a Price Point $1,000 More Than Its Ray-Bans

What Is Meta's 'Teen Accounts' Feature?

Meta introduced Teen Accounts in September and has since enrolled at least 54 million teens globally into the accounts

on Instagram. These accounts are private by default and have strict messaging restrictions, so teens can only be messaged by people they follow. They also prohibit sensitive content, like media that shows fighting or promotes cosmetic procedures, and give teens time limit reminders to leave the app after 60 minutes of use each day.

Meta expanded Teen Accounts to Facebook and Messenger earlier this month and announced that 97% of teens aged 13 to 15 opted to stick with these protected accounts on Instagram.

Meta has been investing in AI to help detect age for years. The company first announced its intent to invest in AI to have a clearer idea of users' ages in June 2022, writing that the AI would use information like when an account was created and how a user interacted with content to determine their age.

Meta's apps, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, have 3.35 billion daily active users as of the fourth quarter of 2024. Instagram has 169 million users in the U.S., per Statista estimates.

Related: 'A Real Uphill Battle': Meta's Antitrust Trial Is Happening Now. Here's What to Know.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/meta-starts-testing-ai-on-instagram-to-enforce-teen-accounts/490331

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7 Silent Mistakes Fast-Growing Startups Make Before

Running Out of Money

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Startups don’t usually die from a lack of ambition. They die from financial fog, a lack of visibility that leads to poor financial decisions.

I’ve worked with enough fast-growing tech founders to know: the closer you get to product-market fit, the more dangerous cash flow becomes. It’s not because you’re failing. It’s because you’re scaling, without visibility and a clear financial plan in place.

What’s worse? Most founders don’t see it coming. Revenue is up. Team morale is high. Growth is visible. But inside the bank account, something’s off.

These aren’t early-stage hobby projects. These are real companies generating $ 2M+ in revenue. Those who often find themselves asking, “Do we have enough cash to make payroll next month?”

Why does this happen? Below are seven silent mistakes that cause even the best startups to run out of money — and what you can do to avoid them.

Related: 5 Biggest Ways Startups Waste Money (and What to Do Instead)

1. Treating revenue as a safety net

There’s a quote often attributed to Steve Jobs: *“If you solve the problem of revenue, you’ve solved a lot of problems.”* There’s truth in that. Strong revenue gives you leverage,

options and breathing room.

But too many founders assume revenue = safety. It doesn't.

Revenue without control is just noise. If you're scaling without tracking margins, burn or collections, that revenue can mask dangerous cracks in the business.

What to do: Shift your mindset. Revenue is not the goal. It is the fuel. You still need to track what it costs to earn, how long it takes to collect, and whether you're making a profit.

2. No real grip on the revenue pipeline

Cash flow problems rarely begin with expenses. They begin with overconfidence in the sales pipeline.

I've seen founders make hiring decisions based on pipeline forecasts that never materialized. Or expansion bets assuming revenue would "probably" land next quarter. That optimism costs them months of runway.

What to do: Monitor your pipeline weekly. Know what's actually closing, not just what's "likely." Tie revenue projections to specific conversion metrics, not gut feel. If your sales pipeline is weak or unpredictable, your entire cash forecast is just a glorified Excel sheet!

3. Delaying strategic finance leadership

Founders know when to hire a head of marketing. They know when to bring on a VP of sales. But most wait far too long to hire anyone in finance beyond a bookkeeper.

The result? No forecasting. No financial models. No insight

into unit economics. Just monthly reports from an accountant who can’t answer strategic questions. What’s worse? They are looking at incorrect and irrelevant numbers and assuming that everything is ok.

What to do: As soon as your business is growing and you’re making key decisions on hiring, fundraising, or pricing, you need a strategic finance partner. That doesn’t mean hiring a full-time CFO. A Fractional CFO can plug into your team and bring that leadership part-time, without bloating your burn.

Related: **Why Most Startups Fail — And the Top Reason Behind It**

4. Scaling before the economics work

I’ve seen companies scale customer acquisition only to discover their payback period was too long, or their margins were too thin to recover the cost of acquisition.

When you don’t know your CAC, LTV and contribution margin down to the decimal, growth becomes dangerous.

What to do: Don’t just track unit economics. Stress-test them. What happens to your cash flow if CAC rises 20% or churn increases? If the model breaks, fix it before scaling.

5. Ignoring the timing of cash flows

Being profitable on paper doesn’t mean you can pay your team.

If customers are on 60-day or 90-day payment terms but your payroll hits every two weeks, your bank balance doesn’t care about “profit.” You’ll run out of money while you wait to get paid.

What to do: Manage cash weekly, not monthly. Build a 13-week cash forecast. Track actual inflows and outflows based on timing, not just invoices. If there's a mismatch, renegotiate payment terms or explore financing tools to close the gap.

6. Expanding without modeling the downside

Founders love growth, and that's a good thing. But when you launch into a new market or roll out a new product without modeling the downside, you're gambling with your runway.

Expansion often comes with hidden costs: delays, localization, compliance and talent. And the payoff always takes longer than you think.

What to do: Build a base case, best case and worst-case model. If the worst case puts your business at risk, pause and rethink. Growth should stretch your business, not break it.

Related: A Good Product Is Not the Same as a Successful Business — Here's How to Turn One Into the Other

7. Fundraising without financial readiness

One of the fastest ways to lose investor confidence is to show up without financial clarity. I've seen founders stumble in meetings because they couldn't answer simple questions about runway, margins, or CAC.

And when investors feel like you don't have a handle on your numbers, the deal gets delayed, or worse, disappears.

What to do: Prepare your financials 6-9 months before a raise. Build a three-statement model. Document your assumptions. Understand what metrics matter to the type of investors you're

targeting, and speak their language.

Final thought: You can’t see your own blind spots

Founders are brilliant. But they’re also close to the product, the team and the mission. That closeness is a double-edged sword.

You need someone in the room who isn’t emotionally attached to your business. Someone who doesn’t care how hard you hustled last quarter, but will still tell you the numbers don’t work. Someone who isn’t there to cheer you on, but to guide you.

That’s what a Fractional CFO brings to the table.

It’s not about producing reports. It’s about giving you insight. It’s about spotting the cracks before they become cash emergencies. It’s about turning finance into a growth engine, not a back-office function.

Because the truth is: when you can finally see the full financial picture, without bias, without noise, you stop reacting. You start leading.

And that’s how you scale, not just fast, but wisely.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/why-fast-growing-start ups-run-out-of-money/486710

Most Leaders Make This Major

Mistake in the Workplace — and It's Destroying Their Teams

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As an entrepreneur, one of your most important responsibilities is building a workplace culture where your team can truly thrive. You've likely heard the saying "culture eats strategy for breakfast" — and it's true. Even the most brilliant strategies will fall flat if your people don't feel empowered to speak up, collaborate and take smart risks. At the heart of this kind of culture is one essential ingredient: psychological safety.

Psychological safety refers to creating an environment where team members feel comfortable being themselves — where they can take interpersonal risks, share ideas, admit mistakes and ask for help without fear of embarrassment or retaliation. It's not about avoiding accountability; it's about fostering trust and openness, so your people feel safe enough to contribute fully.

The concept was popularized by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson, who found that teams perform better when individuals feel free to speak up. Psychological safety isn't just a feel-good perk — it's a proven driver of productivity, innovation and long-term business success.

Related: Do Your Employees Feel Safe? Here's How to Create a Psychologically Safe Workplace

Why it matters

When psychological safety is present, collaboration improves. Teams share information more freely, break down silos and co-create better solutions. It also fuels innovation. In fast-changing industries, companies that take risks and adapt quickly are the ones that succeed. But if your people are afraid of being wrong, they'll hold back – and that's when innovation dies.

Psychological safety also boosts engagement. Employees who feel valued and respected are more likely to go above and beyond. They don't just do their jobs; they advocate for the company, take initiative and stay longer.

The impact of psychological safety isn't theoretical. Google's Project Aristotle, a comprehensive study of over 180 teams, found that psychological safety was the single most important factor behind high-performing teams. When people trust each other and their leaders, they work more efficiently and creatively – and they're more resilient when things go wrong.

In psychologically safe environments, employees take ownership of their work because they feel empowered, not micromanaged. They're more likely to raise their hands with new ideas, challenge assumptions and own their mistakes as opportunities to grow.

What happens without it

When psychological safety is absent, employees hold back. They keep quiet in meetings, avoid trying new things and do only what's expected. Innovation stalls. Collaboration suffers. People burn out or leave.

And when that happens, the costs add up – lost productivity, higher turnover, slower growth and a weakened employer brand that makes hiring harder.

Fear-based cultures breed stress, poor morale and high turnover. Mistakes get hidden, not addressed. Problems fester instead of being solved. In short, a lack of psychological safety costs you more than you think.

Related: Psychological Safety in the Workplace is More Than Being Nice

Measuring psychological safety: The role of connectedness

A recent study of more than 12,000 employees across nearly 50 industries uncovered a powerful insight: When people feel emotionally connected to their workplace, they're 55% more likely to propose new ideas, 44% more likely to admit mistakes and 39% more likely to take calculated risks. These behaviors are essential for innovation and growth.

The study led to the development of the Net Connected Score (NCS) — a new metric that measures whether employees feel "seen and heard" by their managers. This sense of emotional connection is a key indicator of psychological safety and team performance.

The benefits extend beyond productivity. Employees who feel seen are 31% less likely to consider leaving and stay an average of 9.5 months longer. Organizations with high NCS scores experience 39% greater profitability than those with lower engagement — proving that when people feel connected, business thrives.

Practical ways to build psychological safety

Creating a culture of psychological safety requires effort, but the payoff is immense. Here are practical steps to foster

psychological safety:

- **Encourage open communication:** Set aside time for regular feedback and open dialogue. Let employees know their input is valued and their voices matter in decision-making.
- **Model vulnerability:** Be transparent about your own mistakes and lessons learned. When leaders show vulnerability, it encourages others to do the same and creates a safe environment for learning.
- **Celebrate initiative:** Reward experimentation and learning from failure, not just perfection. Innovation comes from trial and error, and it's essential to make space for these efforts.
- **Build team trust:** Encourage team-building activities that promote mutual support. Trust takes time, but it's the foundation of psychological safety.
- **Offer growth-focused feedback:** Provide feedback that is constructive and focused on growth. Avoid punitive feedback, which can undermine confidence and hinder the development of psychological safety.

Related: Psychological Safety Is Crucial to Your Team's Success — Here are 4 Ways to Create It

Creating a culture of psychological safety isn't about making work comfortable — it's about making people feel valued, empowered and engaged. When employees feel safe, they speak up. They solve problems. They grow.

When employees feel seen and heard, the results speak for themselves. From increased innovation and engagement to better retention and profitability, fostering a psychologically safe environment is a strategic business decision, not just a nice-to-have. By prioritizing psychological safety, you unlock the

full potential of your team and set your company up for long-term success.

As you work to build a workplace that values openness, innovation and collaboration, remember that psychological safety isn't just a buzzword – it's a game-changer for your business. Investing in your team's emotional and psychological well-being will pay dividends in every area of your business, from employee satisfaction to your bottom line.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/how-to-foster-psychological-safety-in-your-workplace/489037

'There's Panic and Confusion': One of the World's Biggest Shipping Companies Is Suspending Service on Select Packages to U.S. Consumers

New tariffs have changed customs processing, causing significant delays for DHL Express. The company just announced that it is suspending shipments to the U.S. for select packages starting Monday, April 21.

According to a notice on the company's website, business-to-consumer (B2C) shipments to private individuals in the U.S.

with a declared customs value of more than $800 have been temporarily suspended “until further notice.”

The statement says that the April 5 change for “all shipments to the U.S. with a declared value over USD 800” to “require formal entry processing” has caused a bottleneck at customs, leading the company to experience “multi-day transit delays” when trying to deliver packages to the U.S.

The previous threshold was $2,500.

USA Today notes that though the post announcing the new measures wasn’t dated, metadata shows it was written April 19.

Related: Here’s How Tariffs Will Affect Costco’s Prices, According to the Company’s CEO

DHL is a global logistics and shipping company and Germany’s biggest package delivery and express mail provider.

Louis Kurlander, director of a U.K.-based courier firm, told *The Times* that clients who ship to the U.S. were left in disarray over the holiday weekend.

“There’s panic and confusion because obviously this was dropped on bank holiday weekend,” Kurlander said. “A lot of businesses are not working.”

Kurlander added that the luxury fashion sector could be hit hardest by the ban.

What Is DHL Still Shipping?

DHL notes that business-to-business (B2B) shipments to U.S. companies with a declarable value above $800 are not affected by the suspension, Still, delays are possible.

The service disruption does not include B2B and B2C shipments with a declarable customs value of less than $800.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/dhl-suspending-shipments-over-800-to-us-consumers/490322

Inspired by the Masters? Bring Your Work Hustle to the Golf Course with Mind Caddie, Now $99.99.

Disclosure: Our goal is to feature products and services that we think you'll find interesting and useful. If you purchase them, Entrepreneur may get a small share of the revenue from the sale from our commerce partners.

Take the same focus and determination that makes you a shark in the office out on the golf course when you use Mind Caddie to up your mental golf game. Packed with short audio lessons, guided exercises, and performance tracking, the Mind Caddie app helps you hone in on the mindset that makes you a successful golf player. This usually $209 app is now just $99.99, so don't miss this undervalued investment in your success.

On the course and off

Getting a round in with your colleagues is about more than seeing who makes it under par. It's the time that puts a social face on your business connections. It's the much-needed movement in a week spent sitting before screens and reports.

It can also be a mental exercise in focus and confidence when using Mind Caddie for performance coaching on and off the course.

Golf is as mental as it is physical. When you tap into the Mind Caddie app’s proven coaching methods from Karl Morris – a performance coach for Ryder Cup captains and PGA Tour, European Tour, PLGA, and Ladies European Tour winners – you learn the tools to help yourself achieve success. The program is structured in a way that helps you track your improvements and build mental resilience, all backed by scientific study.

Using the app to improve your game

You’ve already tried tutorials and swapping clubs. Now it’s time to use the simplest tool you’ve got: your listening ears.

Listen to the short audio golf lessons to practice mental strategies. Use guided exercises to build confidence and focus. Follow the step-by-step course to develop yourself as a player. Then, track your performance – what gets measured gets improved, after all. You’ll see the proof in your own performance increases. Transform your mind, transform your game.

A better golf game is out there, and you can play it for just $99.99 with Mind Caddie, now discounted by 52%.

StackSocial prices subject to change.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/living/inspired-by-the-masters-bring-your-work-hustle-to-the-golf/490216

Everyone Needs a Mentor — But Being a Mentor Is Just as Important. Here's Why.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

I didn't start my business on my own. Sure, I'm the only founder, and I conceived the ideas that my company, Jotform, is built around.

But it's also true that I would not be where I am today without the mentors I looked to for advice and guidance. Some of the rules I credit with Jotform's success — for example, that I hire only when I've got a year's salary already in the bank — were lifted directly from other founders who showed me the way.

I've always believed mentors are indispensable for anyone looking to start a business. But I've also come to realize that mentoring others is equally important and can help your business in surprising ways. Here's how.

Related: I Mentor First-Time Entrepreneurs — These Are the 4 Unseen Benefits I Gained By Giving Back

You discover new ways of thinking

One of the worst things you can do as a founder is surround yourself with people who think the same way you do. That's one of the reasons I mentor other founders — I'm constantly surprised by how much I learn just by talking to them.

I've been building my own products for two decades, but that

doesn’t mean I know everything. I’m constantly learning — I dedicate time each day to reading blogs and listening to podcasts to ensure I’m keeping up with what’s going on in my industry. Still, talking to my mentees about how they’re using tools like AI gives me a fresh perspective I can’t get from consuming media alone. By helping them think through how to integrate new technology into their products, I’m thinking through how I can apply those lessons, too.

Being a mentor also requires me to constantly reevaluate my own beliefs. In general, my knowledge has accumulated over years of hard-earned experience. Even so, the process of explaining why I think how I do is incredibly beneficial, either to reinforce those beliefs or challenge me to update them.

You can grow your own star performers

Everyone wants to hire a superstar. But I’ve always preferred to create them by promoting them from within. Mentoring employees within your organization provides a crucial opportunity to get to know their future aspirations, grow their confidence and help them feel more engaged with the company’s mission.

At Jotform, we call our new-hire mentorship program The New Grad Training Program. Basically, we hire people fresh out of school who show lots of promise but lack hands-on experience. They start out by doing support tasks, which range from quality assurance testing to user feedback analysis to answering customer support questions. One day per week, these new hires work with a mentor who can show them the ropes of a given department — maybe they’ll attend meetings with a data analyst or shadow a JavaScript developer. Every six months, participants can interview for the position they want. This program is a great way to develop raw talent and turn our new

hires into top performers.

It’s tempting to wonder what happens if you spend time mentoring an employee, only to have them leave for a shinier opportunity elsewhere. But this is short-term thinking: Studies show that internal hires are not only high performers, they’re also more likely to stay with the organization for the long haul, while high-performing external hires are more likely to leave. My own experience confirms this: At Jotform, our annual churn rate is only 5%.

And anyway, as Henry Ford put it, “The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay.”

Related: 4 Lessons I Gained from Mentorship That Elevated My Startup Journey

You can pay it forward

Many of the world’s most accomplished people are quick to note that they wouldn’t be where they are without the support of their mentors. Richard Branson, for example, already had experience as an entrepreneur under his belt when he founded Virgin Atlantic. That didn’t stop him from enlisting the help of Sir Freddie Laker, the founder of the low-cost airline model, for support. “I have always been a huge believer in the inestimable value good mentoring can contribute to any nascent business,” Branson has said.

Even for someone as well-regarded as Branson, success doesn’t happen in a vacuum. I know mine didn’t. That’s part of why mentoring is important to me — I want others to not only learn, but also feel like they’re not on their journey alone. There are few forces as powerful as having someone believe in you, which also leads to a deeper sense of belonging. According to Gartner, “Belonging is a key component of inclusion. When employees are truly included, they perceive

that the organization cares for them as individuals – their authentic selves.”

Everyone needs a mentor. However, I firmly believe that mentoring others is equally important. Mentoring gives you the chance to learn new things and challenge your beliefs; it also builds relationships with employees who will often grow into top performers. But most importantly, it lets us reach out through the darkness and offer light to someone who needs it, allowing them to chart their own success.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/3-unseen-advantages-of-mentoring-other-entrepreneurs/488762