How This Former CIA Officer Turned Her Spycraft Skills Into a Female Rucking Movement

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Former CIA officer Emily McCarthy helped develop the GORUCK rucksack after her Special Forces husband showed her his military-issued version.
- She obsessed over quality by testing gear in extreme conditions for years, refusing to rush cheaper products to market like competitors.
- McCarthy recruited intelligence assets by understanding what motivated people, and she uses that same approach to earn trust with customers, partners, and her team.

Emily McCarthy spent years working overseas as a CIA case officer. While she was stationed in West Africa, her husband, Jason McCarthy, a former U.S. Army Special Forces officer, came to visit. He'd done tours carrying heavy rucksacks through hostile terrain, so the environment immediately caught his attention.

He told her she needed a rucksack and pulled out one of his military-issued packs. Built for extreme conditions, it had thoughtful compartments and a clamshell design originally meant for medical use. "It was the best bag I'd ever seen," she recalls thinking.

That moment became the foundation of GORUCK. The idea wasn't to reinvent military gear, but to keep what worked in the most demanding environments and strip it down so it could function just as well in everyday life.

At its core, GORUCK reflects how McCarthy learned to think as a CIA officer recruiting assets. You almost never have perfect information and progress comes slow, sticking with the grind long after the novelty wears off.

"If you think you're going to be James Bond every second, you're going to be disappointed," she says.

Here's how she applied what she learned at the agency to building her company.

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Make the most with what you got

In intelligence work, waiting for complete information isn't an option, and McCarthy carried that mindset into building GORUCK. Early on, there was no proof that civilians would want military-grade gear or a fitness practice lugging 45 pounds or more on your back. But rather than overanalyze the market, she paid attention to what she could observe directly. If the gear held up and people kept showing up, that was enough to keep building.

Learn to handle pressure

McCarthy says the pressure of entrepreneurship isn't the same as intelligence work, but it still carries weight. "Life and death isn't always on the line when you're an entrepreneur," she says. "But you're dealing with lives in a different way. It's someone's livelihood."

What changed most for McCarthy after leaving government work was adjusting to the freedom. “I used to say, I hate having to ask permission to go pee,” she says. “Anytime you have to travel anywhere, you have to write a cable and say, ‘I’m going here’.”

Entrepreneurship removed that bureaucracy, but replaced it with a different kind of pressure. “When you’re an entrepreneur, you’re on all the time,” she says.

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Obsess over quality

McCarthy says her obsession with quality comes from her intelligence background. “Money is not an object. It’s like, is this going to work in the most austere environments? Is it going to protect lives?”

McCarthy describes years of cutting fabrics, soaking them, sweating through them, and testing them in heat. When competitors rushed cheaper gear to market, she wasn’t tempted to follow. “We looked at a lot of those, and some of them smelled terrible,” she says. “I didn’t want to wear those.”

That level of testing eventually led to Spy Ruck, GORUCK’s weighted vest designed specifically for women. The goal was to figure out how to carry the weight in a way that still delivered the benefits, while actually fitting women’s bodies and feeling wearable, with materials that were built for product longevity.

McCarthy is quick to say the work isn’t finished. Even after years of iteration, Spy Ruck is still evolving based on how people actually use it. Some women wanted heavier weight options. Others wanted tweaks to fit or feel. Rather than treat the product as done, the team went back to the drawing

board. “We’re still innovating,” she says.

‘Brilliance in the basics’

Long before she was a CIA officer, McCarthy was a volunteer working in Ecuador, where she learned that progress often came from slowing down, sitting with people, and paying attention. “There’s brilliance in the basics,” she says, echoing a phrase often heard in the military.

Real impact comes from showing up and doing the unglamorous work consistently. That belief carried into business, where she’s found that taking the slower, more human path often leads to better results.

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Learn to compartmentalize

In the CIA, compartmentalization wasn’t optional. Information moved only on a need-to-know basis, and mistakes had consequences. “You might be sending out an Intel report that you’ve gathered and you have to be really careful about what you’re saying to whom,” she says.

Over time, McCarthy learned to apply the same discipline internally. When something went wrong, you dealt with the problem in front of you and didn’t let it derail everything else. Learning how to mentally reset, instead of stewing or spiraling, became one of her most useful tools.

Wait for the right moment, not

permission

In the CIA, McCarthy learned that influence rarely came from pressure. It came from patience, curiosity, and timing. When an approach met resistance, she didn't force it. She waited for the right moment or the right person and let outcomes unfold.

That same mindset carried into building GORUCK. Rather than pushing customers, partners, or even her own team toward a fixed result, she focused on understanding what motivated them and earning trust over time. "What I was really trying to do was find what motivated someone," she says. "What do they care about? And that's what I want to care about."

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My Company Just Turned 25. These Four Lessons Changed How I Run a Legacy Business

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Time rewards leaders who trade ego for clarity and control for trust.
- Entrepreneurs and leaders cannot scale a business while acting as its primary bottleneck.

A 25-year anniversary has a way of stripping the story down to what’s true. Not a highlight reel, but the habits that held up under pressure, year after year.

That’s why our milestone wasn’t built on hype, shortcuts or overnight success. It was built through operational discipline, obsessive customer listening and the willingness to evolve from a traditional staffing model into a modern remote workforce company. It also demanded a different kind of leadership as we expanded across continents, cultures and

generations of employees.

Over time, you learn that “legacy businesses” don’t survive by reinventing themselves overnight. They last by evolving steadily, without losing their backbone.

Looking back, these are the four hard-won lessons that explain why we’re still here, thriving and evolving, 25 years later.

Sign up for ‘How Success Happens’ and learn from well-known business leaders and celebrities, uncovering the shifts, strategies and lessons that powered their rise. Get it in your inbox.

Lesson 1: Longevity forces you to redefine what “success” means

In the early years, success is mostly momentum. You’ll measure wins in growth, new accounts and the ability to survive the month. You’re proud when you move fast, when you outwork competitors and even when you keep the lights on.

After 25 years, success becomes less dramatic and more durable. It looks like resilience when conditions change. It looks like consistency when the market is unstable. Above all, it looks like delivering the same quality even as the business becomes larger, more complex and spread across the world.

That shift changes the question you ask as a leader. When I was starting, it was, “How do we grow?” As time went by, it became, “How do we stay trusted?” One of the things I learned is that the most effective way to earn trust is to simply listen obsessively. Without a deep understanding of your audience, even the best ideas fail to gain traction. Trust is built on empathy, and empathy starts when you listen.

Customer listening isn’t a phase you outgrow once you think you already “know your market.” It’s the discipline that keeps

you relevant. In a business that lasts decades, the customer's world changes. Expectations rise. The definition of value evolves. If you keep building from assumptions, you drift. If you keep building from reality, you stay useful.

Lesson 2: As a company grows, leaders have to trade control for trust

Early in my career, I equated leadership with being hands-on. I used to scramble to catch every ball before it hit the ground. I eventually learned that entrepreneurs and leaders cannot scale a business while acting as its primary bottleneck.

Real growth requires a fundamental shift, and you'll have to trade control for trust. Step back from the details and focus on empowering the team. Move from managing tasks to enabling leaders. To this day, I'm more focused on defining the goal and the standard, then I get out of the way. This shift has created a culture that runs itself and delivers top-tier results, whether or not I'm in the room.

Lesson 3: Culture is built through daily leadership behavior

Over time, I learned that culture is how people feel when showing up to work every day, especially when something goes wrong, and there's real pressure on the business.

In a legacy company, culture compounds because your reactions repeat. If leaders get defensive, people get quiet. If leaders stay curious and fair, people speak up sooner. The most durable cultures are built when leaders listen, lead with empathy and make it safe for people to tell the truth. Not

“safe” as in low standards.

Stop punishing honesty. If your team can’t admit a mistake or question a decision without looking over their shoulder, you’ll never scale. Building genuine trust is an easy way to spot fires early and serve clients better. Transparency isn’t a bonus your people should thank you for. It’s the standard they expect. If you don’t provide it, not even a substantial salary will keep them.

Lesson 4: Progress ≠ perfection

Zero in on making progress rather than striving for perfection. Sometimes, holding out for that “perfect timing” can slow things down—there’s no such thing! Progress (movement) is what helps keep the business on the right track.

Over two decades in the business, and I’ve learned that keeping momentum going isn’t just about getting everything spot-on. It is sustained through steady movement and course correction. If your standard is perfection, you will move too slowly. If your standard is progress, you stay in motion long enough to learn what works.

This mindset builds confidence, both for leaders and teams. It creates endurance, which is what a long-term operator needs most. You do not need every answer upfront. The goal is steady decision-making, with people who provide strong judgment and technology that reduces friction along the way.

Legacy is built in mindset and constant adaptability

What I understand now, which I didn’t fully understand early on, is that time is the real judge. Not one great quarter. Not one big client. Not one smart idea.

Time rewards the businesses that keep their promises, even when no one is watching. It rewards leaders who trade ego for clarity and control for trust. It rewards teams that keep improving the work instead of defending the way it’s always been done.

Our 25-year-old company was built by showing up thousands of times with the discipline to get a little better, the maturity to hear hard feedback and the patience to let progress compound. That’s the long game. And it’s still the game we’re playing.

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Apple Is Secretly Building a Tiny AI Wearable That’ll Do Everything Your Phone Does and More

What’s Apple’s next big thing? According to The Information, it’s a small wearable AI pin equipped with dual cameras, speakers, and microphones. The device is similar in size to an AirTag with a thin, circular aluminum and glass shell. It features a standard lens and wide-angle camera for capturing photos and videos.

The pin will likely run Apple’s new Siri chatbot planned for iOS 27. It can wirelessly charge like an Apple Watch. It’s unclear if Apple plans to sell the pin separately or bundle it with future smart glasses.

AI wearables have struggled so far, with companies like Humane discontinuing their AI pins. But multiple tech giants are racing to develop similar devices. OpenAI is partnering with Jony Ive on a small AI device, while Meta has AI glasses and Amazon created the Bee bracelet. The pin could launch in 2027, though The Information cautions development is early and could be canceled.

Read more

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Read more

https://www.entrepreneur.com/business-news/apple-is-secretly-developing-an-ai-pin/502098

How to Turn Ordinary Customers Into Your Most Loyal Advocates

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- Explores a framework for understanding how customers experience and engage with your business.
- Highlights the critical moments that shape whether customers become advocates, remain indifferent, or walk away.

Author Jeffrey Gitomer describes a customer loyalty ladder – a framework for understanding how customers progress from indifference to advocacy – that should unsettle most entrepreneurs. At the top are loyal advocates who refuse to leave and eagerly tell others about you. At the bottom are those who barely know you exist. But the most dangerous group sits in the middle: customers who say you did your job. Nothing more. Nothing less. They feel no attachment, and they may or may not come back.

The first time I read *Customer Satisfaction Is Worthless, Customer Loyalty Is Priceless*, it stopped me cold. Gitomer breaks it down simply: disappoint a customer, and they'll tell ten people. Satisfy them, and they'll tell no one. Wow them and they'll tell everyone. That framework changed how I think about business because it exposed an uncomfortable truth – doing the job is the bare minimum. It earns nothing. It creates no memory. It builds no relationship. It is simply the cost of entry.

I saw that truth play out recently when a client finished a shoot and said, "Wow, that was the easiest filming day ever – and we even got lunch with your team." That's a top-of-the-ladder moment. You can't script it or automate it. You earn it by delivering an experience that feels meaningfully different from everything else a customer deals with.

Most entrepreneurs focus on the before and the after – the sale and the final delivery. But the ladder is climbed in the middle. The *during* stage is where customers decide whether

they’ll stay, leave or tell others about you. It’s the least discussed part of the process, yet it’s the one that defines your reputation.

Related: 5 Key Tips for Building a Successful Customer Loyalty Program

In my company, the during stage is where we invest the most effort. People think we’re just a filming team — cameras, shoots, edits. But the real work happens long before we arrive on site. We spend 30 to 40 hours preparing so the actual shoot feels smooth and stress-free. Clients never see that work, but they feel it. And they remember how it made them feel.

That feeling *is* the product.

Every industry is crowded with people who can technically do the job. Skills are no longer rare. Experience is. Ease is rare. Clarity is rare. A stress-free process is rare. A team that feels human, present and prepared is rare. Those qualities are what move customers up — or down — the ladder.

Research consistently supports this. Buyers say experience matters as much as the product. Many say they will pay more for a better experience. Most say a positive experience is what creates long-term loyalty. These aren’t soft preferences; they’re hard business drivers.

Here’s the uncomfortable part: you can be excellent at your craft and still lose customers. You can deliver perfectly and still be forgettable. Average performance lands you squarely in the middle of the ladder—the shrug zone. That’s where businesses slowly decline without understanding why.

I ask myself three blunt questions often:

- Do customers feel confident before we start?
- Do they feel cared for during the work?
- Do they feel proud of their decision afterward?

If any answer is no, they slide down the ladder.

The ladder has no patience for friction, unclear communication or stress. It punishes anything that makes customers feel alone. But it rewards what feels smooth, thoughtful, and consistent – effort customers can feel even when they can't see it.

Related: How to Leverage Authenticity to Build Unshakeable Customer Loyalty

That's why the comment about the "easiest filming day ever" mattered so much. It was proof the experience worked as intended. It pulled someone upward. And once customers reach the top of the ladder, they stay there.

They stay loyal.
They share your name.
They return without hesitation.
They defend you when cheaper options appear.
They bring others with them.

That level of loyalty can't be bought. It's earned through how people are treated during the journey.

So here's the real question: are you building an experience that lifts customers to the top of the ladder, or are you doing just enough to remain forgettable? If you want to grow, satisfaction isn't enough. Satisfaction is silent. Loyalty is loud.

Design the experience. Protect it. Improve it. And treat the *during* stage as the moment that matters most.

Because when someone leaves saying the day was easier than expected, you're no longer just doing the job. You're building loyalty – and that's what keeps a business alive.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/how-to-turn-ordinary-customers-into-your-most-loyal/500376

Here’s What’s Working in Modern Product Design, What’s Failing and Why You Should Care

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- UI/UX is no longer about making things look good; it’s about making systems understandable, ethical and humane.
- UX used to be treated as a layer applied after other decisions were made. Now, it shapes how systems behave, how people decide what to do next and how hard they have to think just to get something done.
- UI has become quieter, not simpler. The best UI today doesn’t draw attention to itself — it supports orientation, reinforces confidence and stays out of the way.

The user interface/user experience (UI/UX) discipline has moved from making things look good to making systems understandable, ethical and humane. This shift is not subtle. You can feel it in enterprise platforms that finally prioritize clarity over density. You can see it in consumer apps that remove friction instead of adding features. And you can sense it in the growing discomfort users have with interfaces that try to “optimize” them rather than support them.

For years, UX was treated as a layer. Something applied after

engineering, branding or product decisions were already made. That approach no longer holds.

Today, UX is infrastructure. It affects how a system behaves, how people decide what to do next and how hard they have to think just to get something done. When UX fails, the failure is not cosmetic. It shows up as abandoned workflows, mistrust in data, support tickets, compliance issues and internal resistance to change.

This is especially true in complex environments. Enterprise platforms, healthcare systems, financial tools and internal dashboards are now judged less by feature count and more by how reliably people can navigate them under pressure. The state of UX reflects this reality. The focus has shifted toward predictability, consistency and mental load reduction.

UI has become quieter, not simpler

There’s a difference between simplicity and restraint. Much of today’s UI is quieter than what came before, but that does not mean it is easier to design.

Modern interfaces rely heavily on spacing, hierarchy, typography and subtle interaction cues. Color is used more deliberately. Motion is functional rather than decorative. Components are expected to behave consistently across contexts, devices and states.

This has raised the bar for UI design. A quiet interface leaves nowhere to hide. Poor hierarchy, weak contrast or inconsistent logic becomes immediately visible. The best UI today does not draw attention to itself. It supports orientation, reinforces confidence and stays out of the way.

Design systems play a major role here — not as static libraries, but as living frameworks that encode decisions about behavior, accessibility and scale. UI has become less

about individual screens and more about how a system behaves over time.

Accessibility is moving from compliance to competence

Accessibility used to be framed as a checklist: contrast ratios, keyboard navigation, alt text, etc. Those things still matter, but the conversation has evolved.

The current state of UI/UX treats accessibility as a measure of design competence, not regulatory obligation. Designers and teams increasingly understand that accessible interfaces are clearer for everyone. They reduce ambiguity. They improve comprehension. They make systems more resilient across devices, environments and user conditions.

This mindset shift is important. When accessibility is built in early, it affects everything from layout to copy to how people recover from mistakes. It stops being an afterthought and starts guiding the design.

Users are resisting over-automation

One of the most notable discrepancies in modern UX is the push and pull between automation and agency.

What’s meant to assist often ends up directing. Interfaces suggest, choose, and in AI-driven products, even act for users, without enough transparency to build trust.

The result is a quiet impact on trust. Users stop understanding how systems work. They follow prompts without confidence. When something goes wrong, they don’t know why.

The current state of UX reflects a correction. There is a growing emphasis on explainability, reversibility and visible system logic. Good UX today makes room for thinking. It helps

users stay oriented rather than herding them toward outcomes.

Research is becoming continuous, not episodic

Another change is how research shows up in the work. It’s no longer something done at the beginning or checked again after launch. It’s ongoing, woven into product cycles, real usage data and everyday feedback.

Teams are paying closer attention to how interfaces perform over time — where users hesitate, where they abandon, where workarounds emerge. These signals are treated as design input, not just metrics.

This approach reflects how products actually exist in the real world. They’re never finished. Interfaces change as organizations change, as rules shift and as expectations grow. Mature UX shows up in how quickly teams notice what’s changing and respond in a meaningful way.

Consistency is the new differentiator

Ironically, as more products adopt similar visual languages, differentiation has shifted elsewhere. It now lives in consistency.

Consistent navigation. Consistent interaction patterns. Consistent tone. Consistent behavior across platforms. These qualities build trust in ways that visual novelty cannot.

Users notice when a system behaves predictably. They notice when learning transfers from one section to another. They notice when updates improve clarity instead of introducing confusion. This is where strong UI/UX quietly outperforms flashier alternatives.

The role of the designer has changed

All of this has reshaped what it means to practice UI/UX design.

Designers are less focused on producing screens and more focused on shaping systems. They work closer to engineering, content and strategy. They ask harder questions about intent, outcomes and long-term impact.

This doesn’t lessen the role of craft. If anything, it raises the bar. Today’s UI/UX work asks designers to balance how things look with how they function, empathy with real constraints and new ideas with a sense of responsibility.

Where UI/UX is headed

Looking forward, the direction is clear even if the specifics are still forming.

Interfaces will continue to become more adaptive, but successful ones will remain legible. Design systems will deepen, not expand. Accessibility will be assumed, not debated. And UX will increasingly be judged by how well it supports human judgment rather than replaces it.

The state of UI/UX today is not about trends. It is about maturity. It is about recognizing that design shapes systems. And it’s about taking that responsibility seriously.

Good UI/UX no longer announces itself. It earns confidence quietly, one interaction at a time.

Sign up for the Entrepreneur Daily newsletter to get the news and resources you need to know today to help you run your business better. Get it in your inbox.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/science-technology/what-you-need-to-know-about-uiux-design-in-2026/501546

Why Experience (Not

Education) Is an Entrepreneur’s Real Advantage

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

This article is part of the America’s Favorite Mom & Pop Shops series. Read more stories

Key Takeaways

- Failure accelerates learning, sharpening instincts faster than success ever can.
- Confidence comes from surviving hard moments, not studying theoretical ones.

I wasn’t a perfect student.

Not because I wasn’t curious. I learned differently. Sitting still, memorizing answers and waiting to be graded never made much sense to me. Real life did.

That’s where I actually learned how things work.

Real life doesn’t hand you the answers. It hands you situations. People. Pressure. Consequences. You don’t get a syllabus. You get incomplete information and a deadline. You make a call, live with it, and adjust. Sometimes you get it right. Sometimes you don’t. Either way, the lesson sticks.

That’s why experience became my real education.

School teaches answers. Experience teaches judgment.

In school, there is usually a right answer. In business and in life, there rarely is.

You face gray areas. Conflicting opinions. Missing data. The clock keeps ticking. No one pauses the moment so you can catch up. No one tells you which option is safest.

You decide.

Judgment forms when decisions carry weight. When the outcome affects people. When the cost of being wrong is real. No textbook can simulate that feeling. No lecture can replicate that pressure.

Judgment comes from reps. From being in the seat when the call has to be made.

Failure isn’t a detour

I used to think failure meant I wasn’t ready.

What I learned is that failure meant I *was* learning.

Every mistake I’ve made taught me something success never could. How to read a room. How to spot red flags earlier. How to slow down when emotions run hot. How to stay calm when things break at the worst possible moment.

Failure sharpens instincts. Success confirms momentum.

The lessons that last usually come with a little sting. You remember them because they cost you something. Time. Money. Pride. Comfort.

If you never fail, you never build range. You stay untested. Untouched. Unprepared.

Experience teaches timing. No course can.

You can study markets all day long. You can analyze trends and cycles. You can memorize what worked before.

None of that teaches timing like being in it.

Experience teaches when to push and when to wait. When to speak and when to stay quiet. When to double down and when to walk away. Timing is not theory. Timing is feel.

Feel comes from repetition.

You do not learn timing by reading about waves. You learn it by getting knocked over a few times and learning when to stand back up.

Confidence comes from surviving, not studying

Real confidence does not come from knowing the material.

It comes from knowing you have been here before and lived through it.

Experience builds a quiet confidence. Not loud. Not performative. Just steady. You stop panicking at problems because you have solved worse ones. You stop chasing approval because you trust your judgment.

You still prepare. You still care. You just no longer crumble when things go sideways.

Survival builds belief.

Mentors and reps matter

I believe deeply in mentors. I seek them out. I listen. I learn from people who have done what I want to do.

No mentor can live the moment for you.

They can advise. They can warn. They can guide. You still have to step onto the field. You still have to make the call when the pressure is on.

Advice without action stays theoretical. Growth requires participation.

Experience turns wisdom into instinct.

The world does not grade on effort.

School often rewards effort.

The real world rewards outcomes.

You can work incredibly hard and still be wrong. You can prepare endlessly and still miss the mark. That does not make the world unfair. It makes it honest.

Experience teaches accountability. Ownership. Responsibility. There are no extensions. No retakes. No curve.

Results are the only transcript that matters.

Experience forces you to deal with people

Textbooks do not teach you how people behave under pressure.

Experience does.

You learn who shows up when things get uncomfortable. You

learn who disappears. You learn who tells the truth when it costs them something. You learn how to communicate clearly, listen without waiting to talk, and manage conflict without burning bridges.

People skills are not learned in isolation. They are earned in interaction.

Doing reveals what you are actually built for

You can think you want something for years.

Experience tells you if you actually do.

Some people love the idea of entrepreneurship until they meet uncertainty every morning. Others feel most alive in it. Some people chase leadership roles until they realize what responsibility actually weighs.

Experience removes fantasy. It replaces it with clarity.

You do not find your lane by thinking harder. You find it by moving.

Experience compounds faster than credentials

Degrees are static.

Experience stacks.

Every rep builds on the last one. Every win and loss adds context. Over time, patterns become visible. Decisions feel clearer. Reactions feel calmer.

Things start to feel easier. Not because they are, but because you earned perspective.

Experience compounds quietly and pays dividends for a lifetime.

Education gives you tools. Experience teaches you how to use them.

You do not need to know everything before you start. You need to start so you can learn. The classroom can prepare you for the test. Life prepares you for the moment.

The moment is the only thing that ever matters.

Experience is the BEST education.

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- Confidence comes from surviving hard moments, not studying theoretical ones.

I wasn’t a perfect student.

Not because I wasn’t curious. I learned differently. Sitting still, memorizing answers and waiting to be graded never made much sense to me. Real life did.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/why-experience-is-the-only-education-that-matters/501679

I Told My Team to Take Walks

During Our Biggest Crisis — and It's What Kept Us From Breaking. Here's Why.

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Key Takeaways

- When Covid shut everything down, we experienced a 600% demand surge almost overnight. Instead of forcing long work hours, I told my team to take breaks and engage in non-work-related activities.
- Stepping away from work and engaging in activities that require your full attention improves performance.
- Identify the task you dread the most each day, and knock it out early. Then, take a break. This helps you build momentum and adds up to sustained performance over time.

I was CTO at Automation Anywhere when Covid shut everything down. Our cloud product demand surged 600% almost overnight. Businesses suddenly discovered their employees weren't going back to the office for months — maybe longer — and they needed automation to survive. This wasn't a scenario anyone had planned for. There was no playbook.

My investors had one natural fear: Would the crisis kill employee productivity? Would we let our customers down? Would the business weather the storm?

Most leaders would have required 80-hour workweeks. We did the opposite.

I told my team to take walks. Read a book. Learn something new. Play a sport, go for a hike – whatever helped them step away from their screens. It worked. We didn't just survive the storm; we ran faster than ever.

Related: To Improve Productivity, Tell Your Team to Go Take a Hike

The trust realization

I learned something in those first chaotic weeks. We didn't have a motivation issue. In spite of the virus, in spite of all the uncertainty, employees wanted to keep working – to maintain their work relationships. People longed to do something meaningful when everything else felt hopeless and out of their control.

While motivation wasn't the challenge, creating a clear understanding of what was most important and developing the tools and culture necessary to foster trust was. So that's what we focused on. Not micromanaging. Not surveillance. Not having to check in every hour. Trust.

The result? Employees were grateful for the autonomy. And grateful employees work harder not because they're being forced to, but because they genuinely want to.

The case for stepping back

As it turned out, there was science behind what felt like instinct at the time. Researchers at San Francisco State University have discovered that people who regularly participate in non-work-related activities (creative hobbies, sports, etc.) that require the participant to become fully absorbed are likely to perform 15-30% better on performance evaluations than those who don't.

Personally, I have experienced this throughout my career, from

managing 10,000 engineers at Ericsson to leading Sauce Labs as CEO, and I have always found that stress is best managed when you allow yourself to take a figurative step back and evaluate the situation objectively.

To me, finding time to do something that requires your full attention, such as playing squash, is the best way to allow your mind to detach and return to the problem at hand with objectivity.

For larger, more complex problems, I use walking. Typically 10 miles. Walking helps to corral your thoughts and provides a structure for evaluating them. There is something about moving physically and having open space that seems to unlock clarity.

It was during one of these 10-mile hikes that I made one of the most critical strategic decisions for Sauce Labs — to go all-in on AI-based test authoring and intelligence for large engineering teams. This was a fundamental bet on what our customers needed and where the market would go.

It wasn't an incremental improvement. It was a tremendous leap of faith that resulted in immediate product-market fit and real customer excitement. It didn't come from a boardroom. It came from a trail.

Related: 3 Ways to Get Employees to Actually Take a Break

Eat the frog first

There is a fine line here. I'm not suggesting you avoid hard work. In fact, quite the opposite.

My strategy is to "eat the frog first." Identify the task you dread the most each day — the one you're most tempted to delay — and knock it out early. Don't let it sit on your to-do list, draining mental energy.

When you do the hardest thing first, you build momentum. You

create good energy that will carry you through the remaining work.

But here's the trick: After you eat the frog, go take a walk. Play a game. Do whatever you want. The cumulative effect of taking short breaks every day adds up to sustained performance over time.

This isn't about being lazy; it's about being human. We aren't machines. When we attempt to function like machines — processing tasks continuously without rest — we fail. Our decisions get worse. We burn out.

Related: The Easiest Thing I Did to Get Promoted Quickly at Google and Meta Was to 'Eat the Frog' For My Boss

The one framework that has lasted through six career transitions

Throughout my career, I've been an engineer, a startup founder, a CTO/CPO at several companies, and now I'm a CEO. Each transition required learning a whole new set of skills, while unlearning old habits that served me so well in the past.

The only constant I've maintained is spending 30 minutes per day doing something unrelated to technology — sometimes that's squash, sometimes it's a long walk, and sometimes it's simply reading about topics unrelated to software.

Investing in this area has value. It doesn't waste time. It keeps your thinking fresh when everything else about your job is pushing you toward narrow focus and tunnel vision. You need the ability to step back and look at things clearly.

Trust your people. Eat the frog first. Then, go take a walk.

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https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/why-i-told-my-team-to-take-walks-during-our-biggest-crisis/501196

Anthropic CEO Says AI Could Replace Software Engineers in 6 to 12 Months

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei believes software engineers may soon be an extinct species. In an interview with The Economist at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Amodei said AI models could do “most, maybe all” of what software engineers currently do within six to twelve months. “I have engineers within Anthropic who say I don’t write any code anymore. I just let the model write the code, I edit it,” he said.

The bold prediction sparked intense debate on social media. One user wrote, “Software Engineering Will Be Automatable in 12 Months. Yeah, we’re cooked.” Another noted the shift: “AI models will be able to do most, maybe all of what software engineers do end-to-end within 6 to 12 months, shifting engineers to editors.”

Amodei admitted he wasn’t completely certain how fast the transition will happen, noting some components, like chip manufacturing and model training, can’t yet be automated. Before leading Anthropic, he served as Vice President of Research at OpenAI and worked as a Senior Research Scientist at Google Brain.

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Lululemon Had to Pause Sales of New Leggings After Complaints They Were ‘See-Through’

Lululemon has a transparency problem. The company halted online sales of its new “Get Low” leggings Tuesday after Reddit users complained the workout line becomes see-through when bending or squatting. The collection remains available in stores across North America, but the company paused e-commerce sales “to better understand some initial guest feedback and support with product education,” a spokesperson told Fox Business.

The Vancouver-based athleisure brand said the collection is designed to support training with seamless technology for a sculpted look in weightless, fast-drying fabric. The company expects to bring the line back to online channels soon.

This isn’t Lululemon’s first transparency issue. In 2024, the company pulled its “Breezethrough” leggings weeks after launch following negative social media reviews. The brand is struggling to compete in a crowded athleisure market, with its stock falling nearly 50% over the past year. CEO Calvin McDonald steps down January 31 as activist investor Elliott Management disclosed a $1 billion stake in December.

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My Wealth Team Manages $2.7 Billion. These Instincts Are What Matters Most for Your Investment Success

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Key Takeaways

- In investing, structure and discipline matter more than bold ideas or predictions.
- Over-diversification and complexity often hurt returns by undermining clarity, costs and behavior.
- The best portfolio is simple, cost-aware and one you can stick with.

Most entrepreneurs aren’t wired for comfort. They act without perfect information and bet on themselves long before the odds look good. In business, that mindset is often rewarded. In investing, it often leads people in the wrong direction.

After a liquidity event, many founders approach investing the same way they approached growth. The focus shifts to new ideas and new strategies. Far less attention is paid to the decision

that quietly drives everything else.

Asset allocation is the foundation

Research has pointed to the same conclusion for decades. Long-term results are driven far more by portfolio structure than by stock selection or market timing. The data hasn’t shifted much. Asset allocation still explains most long-term results, often more than 90%.

For entrepreneurs, that can feel anticlimactic. Big wins usually come from bold calls. Investing doesn’t work that way. Investing works differently. Outcomes tend to follow structure, not prediction.

The goal is not to find the next moonshot. It is to build a portfolio that compounds steadily, holds up in downturns and supports your life without constant intervention.

When diversification becomes a problem

Diversification is often presented as an unquestioned good. In practice, it is frequently taken too far. Many portfolios today include a long list of asset classes, each added in the name of reducing risk.

The result is often the opposite. This is because complexity increases, fees accumulate and investors lose clarity around what is actually driving performance. When markets become volatile, complexity encourages reaction. Positions are added because they recently worked and reduced because they recently disappointed.

Over time, behavior becomes a bigger drag on returns than market conditions themselves. Portfolios that are difficult to understand are difficult to stick with, especially during

periods of stress.

Asking the question most investors ignore

When people think about asset allocation, the conversation usually starts with what to include. Should you own gold? Should you invest internationally? Should alternatives play a role?

Those are reasonable questions. But an equally important one is almost never asked: What should you not own?

Every additional investment adds friction. It adds cost, correlation risk and emotional complexity. If an asset does not meaningfully improve outcomes after taxes, fees and behavior are considered, it may not belong in the portfolio at all.

Wealth preservation and growth do not require constant innovation. They require selectivity and restraint.

Price discipline still matters

Asset allocation sets the framework, but the price you pay determines how forgiving the outcome will be. All asset classes move in cycles. Optimism drives prices higher than fundamentals justify. Fear pushes them lower than logic suggests.

Entrepreneurs understand cycles in business but ignore them when investing. Chasing performance near peaks and hesitating during downturns is a common and costly pattern, and buying at reasonable prices does not require predicting the future. It requires patience and discipline.

This is often where investors benefit from professional guidance, not because advisors know what will happen next, but

because they help enforce discipline when emotions are loudest.

Costs quietly compound

Entrepreneurs are typically meticulous about expenses inside their companies. They watch margins closely and question recurring costs. That same discipline does not always extend to investment portfolios.

Management fees, transaction costs and taxes may seem manageable individually. Over time, they compound into a meaningful drag on results. Portfolios designed without regard for cost often struggle to support long-term spending needs, especially during periods of lower returns.

Being cost-conscious is not about minimizing fees at all costs. It is about ensuring that every cost serves a purpose and improves the overall outcome.

The portfolio you can live with

Even the best-designed portfolio will experience volatility. No allocation eliminates uncertainty without also eliminating growth. The most successful portfolios are not the ones with the highest theoretical returns. They are the ones investors can stick with through market cycles.

This is where risk tolerance becomes personal. Entrepreneurs already carry concentrated risk through their businesses. Their investment portfolios should acknowledge that reality rather than compound it.

Staying invested during periods of stress is not a test of intelligence. It is a test of temperament.

Why simplicity wins

The longer I work with entrepreneurs, the more convinced I am that simplicity is an advantage. Clear structure creates clarity. Clarity builds confidence. Confidence makes it easier to stay disciplined when markets test your resolve.

These principles are not new. They are not complicated. And they do not depend on predicting the next trend. They depend on restraint and patience.

Leonardo da Vinci once said that simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. In investing, that idea holds up remarkably well. Long-term success does not come from doing more. It comes from doing fewer things well and giving them time to work.

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