

Lean Staffing – A Key Ingredient Behind 100x, 1,000x Ventures

written by CD | JULY 10, 2018

I discovered long ago that life is less about the path you choose and more about how you choose to walk it. Also, if you want to know if you're a good leader headed down your path, turn around and see if people are following you. If you want to know if you're a great leader, consider who is following you and how they choose to traverse that path together. Since I started using the term "Lean Staffing" in 2010, it has become associated with outsourcing – that is not what is meant here.

Venture capitalists look for companies that will give 100x or even 1,000x return on their investments. You can't achieve that even if you prove to be that illusive 10x engineer, but you can if you manage to lead/inspire 10 or 100 10xers... I have been at several companies that have achieved 100x or 1,000x return on investment and have seen what it takes: You need to hire, develop, retain and inspire key talent that will unlock what customers want.

In his insightful book [The Lean Startup: How Today's Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses](#), Eric Ries speaks of his startup lessons learned at IMVU and from many other companies he came to know afterwards including Intuit. In 2005, right about the time Eric was growing IMVU, I joined Intuit after a teaching hiatus. On my first day at Intuit, I was handed the book [The Innovator's Dilemma: The Revolutionary Book That Will Change the Way You Do Business](#) and told to find a way to disrupt the business. Interestingly enough, I was hired into Intuit by the GM of the QuickBooks Payroll business who later became CEO of IMVU and enticed me to follow him there right after Eric left on his adventures as an evangelist of Lean Startup principles. As Paul Harvey used to say "and now, for the rest of the story..."

In Eric's book he focuses on understanding on how to find out what prospects, customers, and the market desire, build to that learning and gain adoption through minimal viable products, experiments and iteration. One concept he speaks of is the 5 whys, an approach developed by Taiichi Ohno, one of the inventors of the Toyota Production System and described in his book [Toyota Production System: Beyond Large-Scale Production](#). Eric points out that typically "what started as a technical problem actually turned out to be a human and process problem." He also

frames a startup as a human institution navigating uncertainty. In these Lean Staffing posts, I focus my rest of the story a bit less on customer development – navigating the uncertainties of what people want and a bit more on talent development – hiring, developing and retaining adaptive people that are or will be the innovators and entrepreneurs that thrive on uncertainty to arrive at those offerings.

The blog posts, links and references found here focus on understanding how to help leaders find, inspire, develop and become people with growth mindsets that will contribute to your collective success.

P.S. I started [my career](#) finding ways to make my coding (using Bill Gates' Basic on an Alair Mini) more efficient and then joined Softlab, GmbH in 1983 – one of the pioneers of building systems to support software development and development methodologies. Softlab was acquired by BMW and I moved to the Silicon Valley to work at three other companies that got acquired and two that IPOed observing and helping innovators and entrepreneurs find success.