

BREAKING THE BARRIER

EPISODE 16

Desperate People Buy From Startups:

Invest in Missionaries vs. Mercenaries — Faith in Silicon Valley

WITH DAVID MOUNT

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EPISODE NOTES

Thank you for joining Breaking the Barrier. In this episode, Nick Madden sits down with David Mount, founder of G2 Venture Partners, a Silicon Valley firm investing where technology meets industry and energy. David spent 10 years at Kleiner Perkins before his team spun out to form G2. He shares what the Valley gets right at its best, from missionary founders to relentless customer diligence, and the season in his late 20s and early 30s when a new firm and a fourth child became too much. This conversation is about building something customers are desperate for while keeping your life in the right order.

Get the Order Right Before the Day Starts

For many founders the business quietly becomes the identity, and David admits that temptation is his too.

"It starts with I am infinitely and unconditionally loved by God. Then I'm a husband, then I'm a dad, then I work."

When he gets back to that order first, he says, there is peace, and a lot of strength for the next battle.

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When It Becomes Too Much, Start With Prayer

In his late 20s and early 30s, David was starting a venture firm while his family grew fast.

"We had literally just had our fourth kid ... and then going out to LP meetings and trying to raise a fund. And like it was too much, right?"

Mentors told him to take some time at the beginning of the day and pray; the practice now goes back 10 to 15 years.

Be a Missionary, Not a Mercenary

Building a startup is so hard that David's mentor, John Doerr, sorts founders by why they do it.

"The missionary folks are the ones who wake up knowing that they wanna go change the world with this company."

Mercenary founders do it for the money and lead a wolfpack, not a team; without a deeper purpose, those companies flame out.

Play the Long Game With People

Most venture-backed companies never become big successes, yet the same people keep building together.

"In game theory terms, it's a repeat game."

If project A fails, you go to project B and invite the old investors back; knowing it is ongoing helps everybody behave well.

Presume Good in the Person Across the Table

From his Jesuit high school, David carries an Ignatian habit into how he listens to founders.

"It's basically presuming good from the other. So walk into a conversation presuming that the person that you're gonna talk to means well"

Nobody founds a business half-heartedly, he says; walking in asking how someone is trying to get something from you is no way to build.

Find Out Why Your Customer Is Desperate

Buying from an unproven company is a personal risk for the buyer, so a startup's customers always have a reason.

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“So there is some compelling reason why that buyer is desperate enough to buy from a startup.”

Before investing, G2 runs surveys and dozens of calls with customers who bought and customers who didn't.

Build Something a Mediocre Salesperson Can Sell

Early on the founder is usually the head salesperson, and then comes an excellent sales team.

“What you eventually want is a mediocre salesperson to be able to hit their quota, right?”

If one or two charismatic sellers drive the whole business, ask how much is them and how much is real product-market fit.

Selling Is Solving a Problem

David once told his mentor Pat Kennedy, founder of OS/2, that sales felt like squeezing people. Pat's answer:

“If you are trying to sell something, you're trying to solve a problem. ... what they're really telling you is, I don't believe you're solving my problem.”

Really solve people's problems and they want to pay you, David says, and that can lead to multi-billion dollar businesses that help people.

Raise the Right Amount, Not the Most

Asked whether founders should raise as much capital as they can while it is available, David disagrees.

“Founders should raise the right amount of capital for their business and their business model.”

A business that could be a win for everyone can be pushed into bad decisions by needing to become a \$10 billion company.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For peer-group and team discussion. Read a question aloud, give everyone a moment to answer honestly, then talk it through.

1. The Order of Your Day

If someone read your calendar, what would they say comes first in your life?

What would change if you gave God the first minutes of tomorrow, before the first email?

2. When It's Too Much

Which part of your life is quietly tipping into too much right now?

Who is one mentor you could ask this week how they kept their order in a season like yours?

3. Missionary or Mercenary

If your revenue stopped growing, what reason would you still have to build this company?

How would your team describe why you lead: a mission, or a number?

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4. The Desperate Customer

Can you name the specific reason your best customers took a risk on you?

Which three customers, including one who said no, will you call this month to find out?

5. Selling as Service

Where does asking for the sale still feel like taking rather than solving?

The next time a customer says it's too expensive, what will you ask to learn why they don't believe you're solving their problem?

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