



# Where do I fit in?

The popular vision of a growing company is of a group of followers flocking round the banner of a charismatic entrepreneur. The reality is much subtler than this. Yes, there will no doubt be an Oprah or a Branson at the centre of things, but they are not the whole story. There are concentric rings of very special people around every entrepreneur, without whom the business will go nowhere, and without whom the entrepreneur is more likely to spend their days tinkering with prototypes or impressing people at parties. This book is for entrepreneurs but just as much for the people who form these essential concentric rings.

For any individual wanting to work in an entrepreneurial environment, the first question must be 'What role am I best suited to play?'

## The entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs are, for all their faults (see below), very special people. Are you one? Look in this mirror and be honest: is the face staring back yours?

Entrepreneurs are *visionary*. Most of us see things as they are, accept them and try and work around them. Entrepreneurs are different. They are mismatchers, rebels, people who see big opportunities that the rest of us miss. Having seen it, they cling to their vision and don't let anyone knock it down. Dreams 'fly forgotten' when the alarm goes and we have to get up; entrepreneurial visions stick around.

Entrepreneurs don't just see things differently and keep seeing them that way – they act on what they have envisioned. They are *doers*, people who delight in action.

They are *battlers*, too. I was going to say 'fighters', but that conjures up images of drunks picking fights. Entrepreneurs won't take 'no' for an answer. Barriers, difficulties and setbacks are challenges, to be risen to and pushed aside or worked around. This feistiness will be tested to the limit. Almost every successful entrepreneur I know has at least one story

of when their business seemed doomed, but they found a way of saving it, whatever it took.

A common perception is that entrepreneurs are greedy. Many certainly want to make money, but I have met few for whom this is the main motivation. Instead, their vision becomes a *passion*. The business becomes an object of a kind of love, like an artist has for their creation or even a parent for their child. That's a much deeper driver than money. Several entrepreneurs have told me: 'Money is just how you keep the score.'

Entrepreneurs are *confident*. They are born optimists. This optimism is often irrational – it can infuriate their more realistic friends – but it just bubbles up in them. 'I can do it!' And, of course, they do.

Entrepreneurs are *charismatic*. Not just optimists, they have optimism to spare, optimism which they radiate and instil into others around them. No wonder they attract people, not just followers but energetic, imaginative winners. They'll need this quality, over and over again – with their business partners, with their employees, with their sources of finance, and most important of all, with their customers. But that's fine as they've got a seemingly endless supply of it.

There may appear to be exceptions to this: introvert business-builders who seem grey at first sight. However, my experience is that these people have a hidden charisma which they unveil in the right circumstances. Bill Gates, for example, is often parodied as being utterly uncharismatic, but I saw him years ago among a group of technical people, and he was the centre of attention.

Entrepreneurs are *in a hurry*. Not only are they going to change things, they are going to do it fast.

Luckily, they have bags of *energy*. They're going to need it, every ounce of it. But somehow, they know it's there. All the entrepreneurs I have met seem to sleep less than normal.

Their extra hours are filled with *hard work*, of course. Entrepreneurs, in love with their business, can become obsessed with work. When they're not doing it, they're talking about it. Not the best thing at dinner parties, but great for success.

Does this look like you? If so, be proud!

## The Beermat guide to entrepreneur traits

- Visionary
- 'Doers' – love action
- Battlers – won't take 'no' for an answer
- Passion for the business
- Confident
- Charismatic
- In a hurry
- Lots of energy
- Hard work

Now for the difficult bit.

Entrepreneurs are also *arrogant*. They know they are good. At everything. With a strong team around them – and they can't flourish without such a team – this attitude mellows to 'I'm good at everything but I don't have the time to do everything, so I have to let the people in finance, sales, delivery (and so on) get on with it.'

But even then, the team needs to remain on guard against the entrepreneur's passion for meddling. The worst thing about this meddling is that it is appallingly inconsistent. One day the entrepreneur will be stomping round the office fixing light bulbs, the next phoning up customers out of the blue, the next trying to rewrite software, the next . . .

This arrogance is the 'flip' side of the entrepreneur's confidence and vision. Vision is not always a good trait: Hitler, Mao and Stalin knew they were right. But so did Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela.

They are also *manipulative*. Just as arrogance is the flip side of the entrepreneur's confidence and vision, manipulation is the dark side of charisma. Entrepreneurs can use people. They may inspire them, they may enable them to achieve things they'd never achieve on their own, but they still use people.

That valiant refusal to take 'no' for an answer can easily morph into *pig-headedness*.

Entrepreneurial energy can often dissipate. They're forever coming up with new ideas. They love brainstorming sessions and blaze with excitement at new projects. 'Why don't we . . . ?' 'Supposing . . . ' 'And then we can . . . ' This is perhaps part of a bigger weakness, *lack of focus*. I said that entrepreneurs are obsessed with work, and they are. Yet at the same time many of them seem unable to focus on specific issues for any length of time. It's as if, having walled themselves away from most of what the rest of us call life, they have to pace round and round this little courtyard with extra energy. If you are an entrepreneur, please make yourself focus on detail. More important still, listen to your closest colleagues when they focus on detail.

Entrepreneurs can become *obsessed with the competition*. I know one who founded a company with the sole purpose of putting a rival out of business. I shall talk about 'how to compete' in the next chapter, but I don't think I'm giving too much away by saying this obsession can be disastrous, both commercially and personally. If you feel yourself going down this road – back off. Concentrate on improving *your* proposition.

Entrepreneurs can be *impatient*. They want everything done yesterday. Time is a precious commodity in business, so this is understandable, but sometimes you have to take things slow and steady, and entrepreneurs are often not good at this.

### Oh, and . . .

- Arrogant
- Manipulative
- Pig-headed
- Lacking focus
- Obsessed with competition
- Impatient

So there we have it. Laid back, sophisticated, gentle? No. Contrary, childlike, obsessive – that’s more like it. More like you?

I have come in for criticism for type-casting entrepreneurs in this way, but I stick to my guns. It fits the vast majority of the entrepreneurs that I have met. Obviously not every entrepreneur has all these strengths and all these weaknesses in full measure, but almost all of them have a healthy – and unhealthy – dose of them. The idea, popular in some business schools, that entrepreneurship is simply a set of behaviours that can be learnt by anyone does not fit with my experience.

This does not mean that learning the craft is an optional extra. People blessed with these traits are in pole position in the ‘Entrepreneurship Grand Prix’, but the race still has to be driven and won, with skill as well as passion.

Successful entrepreneurs create employment, opportunities, choice, wealth and change. They inspire people to do things of which they hardly imagined themselves capable. They challenge orthodoxy and convention, even when it is deeply entrenched in society and its institutions. They do this much more than most politicians. If it weren’t for these men and women of vision, action and drive – with all their weaknesses – we’d probably still be sitting around in caves, chewing on our staple diet of mammoth. Entrepreneurs truly change the world.

But they don’t do so alone.

## . . . and their teams

I’ve had enjoyable debates with successful solo entrepreneurs, who say this is not the case. They gesture round at an open-plan office full of busy, engaged people and say that they built all this on their own. However, most of them turn out to be much better team-builders than they give themselves credit for. They have a natural talent for picking good people to work alongside them and for keeping such individuals motivated.

I also hear many stories of solo entrepreneurs who, rather than build teams, employ unconfident people whom they then bully. Usually, the

underlings put up with this for a while then leave, after which the business implodes, leaving the entrepreneur ranting at the fickleness of humanity (apart from them), how they were let down by x, y and z (and so on). Of course, there are no absolutes: some of these 'my way or the highway' types do manage to build successful businesses. But that's not the Beermat way.

Beermat entrepreneurs build a team around them. Actually they build four teams, radiating out from them as the business grows: a foil, a founding team, what I call their 'dream team' and, finally, more conventional types of employee. These form at different stages of the growth of the business.

## The foil

The foil is the first person the entrepreneur hooks up with, and usually the most important. Many great businesses are founded by an 'entrepreneur and foil' team. Many good businesses stumble or even fall when the entrepreneur and foil fall out.

Many entrepreneurs and foils were friends before the business begins. Some are actually siblings. The Instruction Set was an example of one of the latter (Pete and Dave Griffiths). Oppo Ice Cream (Charlie and Harry Thuillier) is another. Broker's Gin was founded by Martin and Andy Dawson. Other entrepreneurs struggle until they find the right foil. Monique Drummond of Relish Research says that her biggest break was not some giant piece of business but finding the right person to work alongside her to build the company.

Foils complement entrepreneurs. This can mean doing things that entrepreneurs don't get round to: completing (or quietly dropping) things that entrepreneurs have started but lost interest in; focusing on detail; unruffling feathers. It also means doing things from the start that the entrepreneur doesn't like doing (exactly what I shall explain below). It also means getting on with the entrepreneur, who can be moody. The ideal relationship between entrepreneur and foil is one of mutual trust and respect. Ideas can be discussed objectively. There's no 'point scoring', or if there is, the point scorer soon realises their mistake and makes

amends. Criticism, and reaction to criticism, are not taken personally (for long, anyway).

Foils are also enthusiasts, of course, with almost as much passion for the business as the entrepreneur – nobody will quite love it the way the entrepreneur does.

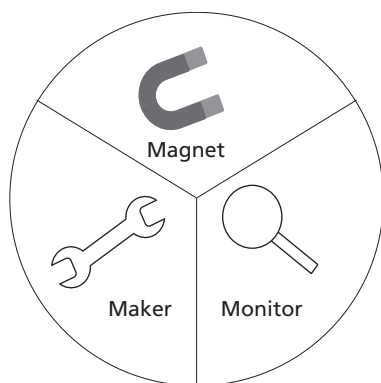
The foil should be a different *personality type* to the entrepreneur. I don't want to go overboard on personality types, as it risks putting human beings, who are all delightfully different, into simplistic boxes. However, a little gentle, not-taking-it-too-seriously putting in boxes can be enormously helpful in making sense of the personality clashes often found in start-ups, and of the personality needs of start-ups. I find the following model simple but powerful.

*Magnets* are the charmers, the 'people people', the ones who have to be out there making new friends or introducing a to b. They have charisma. They impress. Magnets love the limelight, and somewhere deep inside they believe they have a right to be in it. In the less pleasant magnets, this belief has a sharp edge to it, a potentially fragile sense of entitlement. To the more pleasant ones, it's simply there. 'Why not? Someone has to be centre stage, so it might as well be me.' No surprises: sales people are magnets. Most (but not all) entrepreneurs fit into this category too.

*Makers* are the technicians, the designers, the system-builders, the architects. Apparently modest, they actually have a fierce pride in what they do. They love technical discussions. They do not love criticism of their work, except when it is a) very tactful or b) from someone whose expertise they are in awe of. They get enough criticism from themselves, anyway.

*Monitors* are the protectors. They are the members of old-fashioned 'professions'. Safety is paramount for them and lies in following correct processes and procedures. Many lawyers and accountants are monitors (though a savvy magnet who has mastered these skills can be very successful in business). Many HR people are monitors. I suspect all health and safety inspectors are.





Magnets tend to be more outward-looking than makers or monitors, who are, instead, focused on themselves and the task they are engaged in. Magnets also tend to want to be liked, while makers and monitors will be happier to be judged by their work. They don't care what people think of them, as long as they know, inside, that they have done a good job.

Makers and monitors can fall into the 'perfectionist' trap of believing that if they create the perfect (by their own standards) product or the perfect system, the business will automatically prosper. Magnet perfectionism can go the opposite way, and try and overplease others, promising benefits way beyond what is actually possible.

Yes, almost everybody has a bit of each of these three types in them. But for most of us one of the three is dominant, and in some people – often the ones who excel in what they do – one is extremely dominant. Most monitors or makers can find their 'inner magnet' if they have to. Chris, my co-author, is a classic maker, but can be very sociable when he has to be. But most monitors or makers usually can't wait to get back to their preferred way of being and find it stressful to be asked to spend too long outside it.

If you're a devotee of the popular Myers-Briggs model, magnets tend to be ESTP/ENTP, makers ISTP and monitors ISTJ. But don't get too concerned if you did a Myers-Briggs test and didn't come out as one of these. Just ask 'Am I a magnet, a maker or a monitor?'

Returning to the subject of the foil, most entrepreneurs are magnets and for them the foil should be a maker.

However, some entrepreneurs are makers. This may sound odd, given my views on entrepreneur traits above, but it's true. Less common still, but often very successful, are 'monitor' entrepreneurs. The builders of large, now old-fashioned conglomerates like Hanson Trust, BTR, ITT and, going back even further, Standard Oil, fell into this category.

The 'maker' entrepreneur needs a 'magnet' foil, who will enjoy getting out there and engaging people in the project. There are plenty of examples of magnet foils, especially in the world of online enterprise, where maker entrepreneurs build and refine amazing systems and someone else does the communication. An outgoing individual with some experience in sales would be perfect for this role.

So who does the finance? In many start-ups, the answer is 'no one'. The maker should probably do the basic accounting, but the best answer is to pay a part-time, 'monitor' bookkeeper as soon as possible. Start-ups that require lots of cash to get off the ground will need not just a bookkeeper but a fully-fledged finance director from the beginning (they can be part-time too, but must be good), as someone needs to inspire investors with the belief that their investment will be monitored. But most start-ups don't need that much upfront investment (more on this below).

Problems arise when two makers form a team. One may be a bit more outgoing than the other, but such pairs often both secretly prefer building things and, in their hearts, believe that if they build them well enough, customers will come. In this case, a team of two makers, the more extrovert of them *has* to put down their tools or switch off their computer and become the salesperson. Or, the best strategy, they must both stop making things for a moment and concentrate on finding a magnet to join the team. I talk more about how they actually do this in the next chapter.

Less common is two magnets teaming up. Try pushing two actual magnets with the same polarity together and you'll see why. And if you do get two magnet individuals working together and working well, the immediate question arises: what exactly are they going to sell? Or, if

they do create something saleable, who is actually going to buckle down and deliver it?

As a mentor, I meet many more makers than magnets or monitors. 'Find someone to sell it' is the piece of mentoring advice that I give most often.

## The third person

It happens a lot: an entrepreneur and a foil have got a business up and running, but then they hit a wall of some kind. This is often in the form of a delivery bottleneck. The orders have started coming in faster than expected (often for no reason anyone quite understands) and suddenly the delivery schedules are slipping. The third person is someone who will sort this out, an experienced project manager or a bright, orderly-minded friend who picks this skill up very quickly. Such a person could well be a monitor, with the monitor's belief in the redemptive power of process, thus making up a powerful combination of magnet/maker/monitor in the business.

If the original pair consisted of two makers, the block will probably be shortage of sales. As I said above, the third person here needs to be a magnet.

The third full team member could be a finance specialist. However, my experience is that, for businesses where the finances aren't that complicated, the third person will usually be needed to beef up delivery or sales.

The arrival of a third person in the team can be disruptive for the entrepreneur and foil. I often draw the analogy of a marriage plus an outsider. But wise entrepreneurs and foils realise that some measure of disruption is needed if they are to build a business.

## Cornerstones

These three people may end up as the *founding team* and run the show.

However, building a successful business involves so many different and crucial tasks that it is hard for three people to cover all the bases. I still

prefer the next odd number up, five, to lead a growing business. (Odd numbers are best because that avoids stalemates in decision-making. A team of four can so easily fall into two camps of two each.) A top team of entrepreneur plus four *cornerstones*.

Three cornerstones will be in charge of the three essential tasks in a Beermat business: sales, finance and delivery. A fourth cornerstone brings a fourth skill, which varies from business to business. I call this the 'critical factor'. In technology businesses, this skill can be innovation. In consumer businesses it can be marketing (I shall say more about the critical factor cornerstone later).

The foil will usually end up playing one of the cornerstone roles. In The Instruction Set, Dave was foil to Pete, his entrepreneur brother, yet his formal title was finance director. He was our finance cornerstone (and an outstanding one). This looks like a demotion for the foil, who now appears to be just another member of the team of four around the entrepreneur. But it is best seen as an extra role for the foil, in response to the rising level of challenge created by the success of the business. The foil now has to wear two hats. Day to day, they take a back seat (albeit one in the boardroom). But, especially at times of crisis, they will have the entrepreneur's ear in a way that the rest of the top team never have. When we sold The Instruction Set, for example, the deal was organised by Pete and Dave, entrepreneur and foil.

It's a subtle balance.

I accept that many successful businesses don't have the five-person top team I advocate. Fine. There's almost always one entrepreneur, usually plus a foil. If they have any sense, they have a small number of highly reliable people supporting them, in charge of the key functions of the business. Whether they have boardroom authority or not – I believe they should have – these people are still the cornerstones on which the business is built.

I still recommend a top team of five if a business is to grow beyond the 25-people level. So if you are setting out to conquer the world, I suggest thinking about your foil and three other cornerstones from the very start. If you are less ambitious and thinking more along the lines

of 'I want to start a business and see how far I can grow it, and if I end up with 25 people and a turnover of a few million pounds a year, I shall be deliriously happy', then a smaller team may well do.

Cornerstones, like foils, are very special people, with a magical mixture of solidity and entrepreneurial passion.

Their solidity comes from their *character*. They are reliable, conscientious, loyal.

It also comes from their commercial or technical *skills*. Cornerstones are professionals. In some start-ups, they may not be hugely experienced professionals, but they are hell-bent on mastering their profession. This provides essential objectivity.

Yet at the same time, they are *passionate* about the business. This is not just a dry exercise in expertise.

Cornerstones have considerable *personal skills*. It's not enough just to be reliable, good at a business discipline and passionate about the idea. Working with the mercurial entrepreneur, cornerstones need to be able to tell the truth tactfully, and to remain calm and cool when the entrepreneur still tries to overrule them.

They need the entrepreneur's capacity for *hard work* – there are no free rides in a new business. Cornerstones must have the same level of ambition as the entrepreneur and the foil. It can often happen that people say they are ambitious, but when the level of work needed to fulfil those ambitions become apparent, they realise that, actually, they have other priorities. No initial deception was involved – they just didn't know how strenuous it would be.

They need *courage*, possibly more courage than the entrepreneur at times. Entrepreneurs can be blinkered by their natural optimism, while cornerstones can see the potential hazards much more clearly.

A big ego can be a help to an entrepreneur, but not to a cornerstone. You've got to have a *bit of ego* to seize the leadership challenge that the cornerstone role involves. But not too much. In the end, the entrepreneur is the boss, and you must accept that.

## The Beermat guide to cornerstone attributes

- Reliable
- Professional skills
- Passionate
- Personal skills
- Hard work
- Courage
- Moderate ego

Though cornerstones share these traits, it's important to note that in other ways they differ. Going back to our model of personality types, there needs to be a balance of magnets, makers and monitors in the top team. It is a mistake that some entrepreneurs make, to fill the business with people like themselves. In some ways they are right to – everyone in a start-up needs passion, commitment and adventurousness. But in other ways, the wise business builder looks for people of different temperaments, values those differences, and learns how to get the best from them.

You don't have to be a cut-out 'business type' to do well in enterprise. You have to be eager for the start-up adventure, but beyond that, you have to be who you are, play to your strengths and find an environment where that is what other people want from you. You should respect other people's different strengths too.

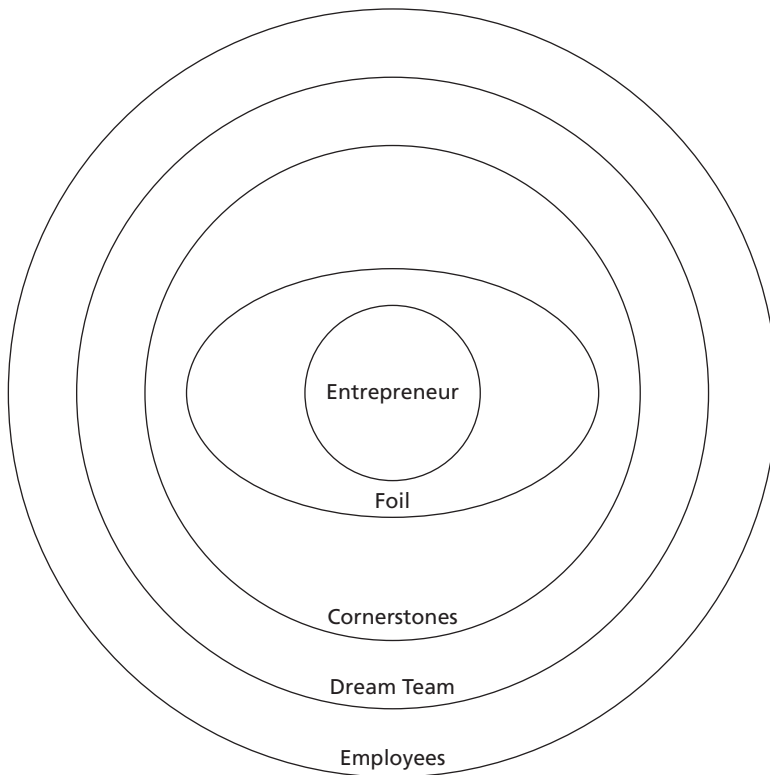
## The dream team

When this top team starts hiring, a new, outer ring of special individuals will join the business – I call them the *dream team*, an analogy with sport.

Like cornerstones, the dream team's members are a mixture of conventional skills and entrepreneurial flair. Unlike the foil and cornerstones, they have less 'skin in the game'. They will have a lower level of skill and experience too. Much lower in the case of some dream-teamers, who may well be youngsters new to the world of work, with few formal skills. But they have bags of creativity and can-do spirit, and the start-up gives them the chance to express this. I shall say more about these wonderful people in the chapter on the 'sapling' enterprise.

## Big company employees

This fourth, outer ring only develops if the company gets beyond a certain size. I shall talk about them in Chapter 4: The mighty oak.



### *The entrepreneur and their teams*

# The intrapreneur

Do you work for a big company but secretly dream of being an entrepreneur? Do you at the same time fear the loss of security that would come from packing the job in and going it alone? I have met plenty of people in this situation. The way forward is to become an intrapreneur, initiating and driving new projects within the company.

Intrapreneurs have some advantages over the external start-up. Their employer may provide things such as premises, funding, marketing support, mentoring, contacts and access to a pool of talented potential cornerstones and a dream team, all of which the entrepreneur 'out there' has to go out and find. In return, of course, the intrapreneur loses freedom and the chance to become seriously rich. But many people find the compromise satisfying.

When *The Beermat Entrepreneur* first came out, intrapreneurship was frowned on in most companies (with a few notable exceptions). It was seen as unnecessarily 'rocking the boat'. Since then, more and more organisations have understood that intrapreneurs can be powerful sources of competitive advantage. Many now have formal systems whereby employees can submit entrepreneurial ideas to a panel, and, if they succeed, be given paid time, a budget, people and other resources to develop these ideas.

Some even have specific intrapreneurial divisions, where large, speculative projects are developed. The most notable is probably Google X, the company's skunkworks set up to invent and build 'moonshot' technologies, ones that it hopes will 'make the world a radically better place'. This has produced (amongst other things) the Waymo driverless car and Google Glass, the 'computer in a pair of spectacles'. X has recently been partially spun off from the parent organisation – it and Google are now both subsidiaries of Alphabet, a holding company – but it is still culturally a Google business.

The original skunkworks, by the way, was created by Lockheed Corporation during World War Two to design and build the US Air Force's first jet fighter, the P-80. The new division was located in a circus tent, next to an evil-smelling plastics factory which is how the skunkworks got



its name. In those back-to-basics conditions, designers and engineers took a mere 143 days to design and build a working prototype. Such is the benefit of unleashing intrapreneurial energy.

Other companies, keen to hold on to talent, allow employees to take some time off to work on their own 'side hustles'. This seems particularly common in the media world.

Sadly, however, many companies still don't value intrapreneurship, and this can make life tough for the entrepreneurially minded employee. If your current employer is dead set against such subversive radicalism, it's time to look for somewhere where your imagination and energy will be valued and put to use.

The fundamental process of building an enterprise is the same within a company as outside it, so intrapreneurs should read this book and follow it as closely as entrepreneurs in the world out there.

Note that for companies, letting intrapreneurs loose is not a pure win – there will be some downsides. Remember those negative attributes of entrepreneurs: you are just about to unleash these people (or at least gentler but still disruptive versions of them) on your tidy corporate culture. Some valuable, solid team players may be offended by their unconventional attitudes and buccaneering style. Of course, I think you've done the right thing – you're getting back to being a proper business again, not a Jurassic customer-proof bureaucracy. But watch out for a few internal bruises.

## Your private life

Setting up and running a business is about as demanding an activity as you can get. If you are in a relationship it may not survive the competition. If you already have a family think very carefully about how you are going to balance your time.

Entrepreneurs (and foils and cornerstones) often tell their long-suffering partners: 'I'm doing this to give us a good life.' This is at best a half-truth. You're doing this because you need to, somewhere deep within you. Money is only a part of the reward. The partners of entrepreneurs

may well feel jealous of their passion for the business. I don't blame anyone who feels this.

It takes a special person to partner an entrepreneur, foil or cornerstone. They have to be calm and not too dependent. A life of their own will protect them from their partner's crazy schedule: early starts, late home, sudden meetings or jumping on a plane to meet an overseas customer or technical expert. They have to be interested in the business as they'll hear a lot about it over the breakfast table – assuming their partner is at breakfast rather than having already been at work for two hours. The best ones know their partner so well that they can tell when that line between hard work and destructive stress has been crossed, and can choose a good time, sit them down and get them to open up about it.

Female entrepreneurs, foils or cornerstones can be faced with a problem here, as some men still find playing a supporting role difficult. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century they shouldn't. If a man is giving maximum support to his partner as she builds a great business, he should be hugely proud of both himself and her. But not every bloke has reached this point. If you love someone who is not really good at this stuff, find a support network that will provide it.

Some people, of course, find themselves single, or prefer so to be, or have a same-sex partner, or have multiple partners . . . Whatever your situation or choice, if you are entrepreneur, foil or cornerstone you will need support on a personal level. Make sure you get it.

The worst kind of partner for an entrepreneur is one who sees them as a ticket to a good life. That's OK, I suppose, if the business succeeds, though not something I have any respect for. But if the business tanks, which it is more likely to if the entrepreneur is poorly supported emotionally, then watch this kind of person stalk off in high dudgeon at their entitlement to wealth having been disappointed, probably blaming you for failing them in some way.

It might sound a bit corny, but the truth is that the best partner for an entrepreneur is one who loves them and who is loved back. But even the most loved-up couples should talk the issues through in advance. And keep talking.

## The Beermat entrepreneur's perfect life partner

- Calm
- Not too dependent
- Accepts the crazy hours
- Interested in the business
- Can get them to talk
- ♥♥!

Business can put a strain on relationships through time away from home and the company of glamorous, interesting (and often, underneath it all, insecure) people. If you sense a confession coming up – sorry, I was single during my time as a cornerstone and stayed that way. This was more due to pressure of work than any choice. I remember going on a date with a lovely woman, who seemed to find me attractive too – and falling asleep over dinner, because I'd been so busy at work. She was very understanding. I met my future wife after selling the business, when I had time to conduct a relationship properly.

If you have kids, then the issue gets more serious still. I'm not saying don't get involved in an ambitious start-up – and if I were to, and you were a natural entrepreneur, you wouldn't listen anyway – but work this out. Talk, talk, talk.

You can forget that much-loved hobby, of course – for the moment, anyway. Later on, you may be able to enjoy it extravagantly.

Of course, some couples do things differently, and actually either *both* run the business or have it so one of them plays a role in a business that the other runs. This is an impressive achievement.

There's an interesting debate about the best time in your life to start a business. I'm not sure this debate is hugely productive as different

people have different journeys. But I would advise anyone wanting to start straight from school or university to spend at least a couple of years in employment first. You'll learn a hell of a lot in that time. If you want to set up a business in a particular sector, get a job in it. If for some reason you can't, just get into the world of work anyway.

Taking this further, I like the idea of spending your early twenties trying various ways forward, then getting really good at one specialist thing in your late twenties and early thirties, and finally starting out on your own aged around 35. But I appreciate that not everyone will see things this way. Some of the ablest entrepreneurs I know, such as Martin and Andy Dawson, started much later than this, after quite long careers in corporate-land. Maybe the best advice is to start out when your gut instinct screams at you to. 'The time is now. I just know. It's a gut feeling . . . ' Lots of entrepreneurs have told me that, or something similar.

So you're ready to go – ready and hungry. And you were honest about yourself, so you really know what role suits you best. Entrepreneur? Foil? Cornerstone? Dream-team player? Intrapreneur?

**Time to get moving!**