



Life Cycle Stages

Courtship

Courtship is the first stage of an organization's development. At this stage, the company is not yet born. It exists as a gleam in the founder(s) eye. The focus of Courtship is necessarily on dreams and possibilities.

The primary goal of this stage is to build the founder's enthusiasm and commitment to his dream. The higher the risk, the deeper the commitment needed. As Conrad Hilton said, "If you wish to launch big ships, you have to go where the water is deep."

In Courtship, it is normal to experience fear, uncertainty and doubts. What exactly are we going to do? How is it going to be done? When should it be done? Who is going to buy this and why? Now is the time to wind-tunnel test the brilliance of the Founder's vision.

The goal of the fledgling business should be to add value and satisfy market needs. Founders that are in it solely for the money, often don't have the fortitude to sustain their companies over the rocky road they will encounter in Infancy and Go-Go. A useful definition of a founder is someone with; "unreasonable conviction in the face of insufficient evidence." By definition, most will think that the idea for the new business is risky, and probably won't work. It is not important that everyone else believes it will work. It is crucial that the founder(s) believe it will, and are committed to doing whatever it takes to make the new company succeed.

Problems of Courtship

Normal problems

Over-excitement, possibly unwarranted.

Fuzzy on many details.

Fear, uncertainty and doubts.

Mixed goals. Change the world and make money.

Abnormal problems

Low commitment ("try it and see" attitude).

Over-thinking the details, stalling.

Lack of fear.

Exclusive focus on making money.

Pathologies of Courtship: The Affair

A Courtship which has no testing of the harsh realities that face any new business can easily degrade into an Affair where the founder's commitment evaporates at the first sign of difficulty. What is an affair but lots of enthusiasm with no real commitment?

Prescription for Success

When the founder(s) makes the bold decision to quit their day job, mortgage their house and/or accept the seed capital, the organization is born and instantly moves into Infancy. With this simple act of faith, the founder(s) cast off on a wonderful, and largely uncontrollable, journey of triumph and tragedy.

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness, concerning all acts of initiative and creation. There is an elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

W. H. Murray, The Scottish Himalayan Expedition, 195

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