

URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/?post_type=snippet&p=57262

Who are the unsung heroes of your story, of every startup success story? Gabriel Parisi-Amon, co-founder, CTO and COO of Nebia, says to look around you, but not necessarily to your company's board of directors. By remaining connected to your community of friends, families and mentors outside of work, you'll have an invaluable behind-the-scenes support network to get you through the growing pains of founding a startup.



Transcript

- I wanna talk about the people who aren't on your corporate website, the people who made a difference for me, the difference between walking away from Nebia, from SF, from life as I knew it, the people who peeled me off the floor when I was sick to my stomach, tired, angry, broken.. Those people are rarely on your cap table or your board.. They never have a photo on "About Me" page of your company.. They are your real friends and mentors, the ones you were born with, the ones you grew up with, the ones who are sitting beside you right now, and the ones who you will meet along the journey who have helped you without any ask in return.. They don't just e-mail you when you hit 3 million dollars on Kickstarter or you appear in Forbes "30 Under 30".. They e-mail you when they haven't heard from you in a while.. They pick up the phone when you call at 10 a.m.. on a work day because you've been outside crying in a park outside your office.. They help you get out of bed when you wake up nauseous for the 18th day in a row and you don't know how you're gonna eat enough to survive, let alone go to work.. They are the unsung heroes of every founder's success story..

The first set of these people are mentors.. I both screwed this up royally and nailed it.. Several times people offered to help, and I was too embarrassed to take it, often where I was weakest.. I thought because of my degrees and experience, I should be able to do this alone.. I was wrong.. I learned things the hard way, I made mistakes I could've avoided because I was too proud to take help.. Please don't make this mistake.. Mentors are people who have been there.. They don't have to and probably shouldn't be famous, but they need to care and understand what you are going through.. They are founts of wisdom but also hard truths..

They encourage you, and they reality check you.. Most importantly, they don't ask for anything in return, except maybe to pay this kindness forward.. I've been fortunate to have half a dozen people who have done this for me, and they blur into my friends.. One particular mentor is a former Mayfield Fellow, someone who every time I walk out of a meeting with him, I feel inspired and ready to execute.. He's a rare balance of exceptional intellect and profound emotional intelligence.. I could spend the rest of this hock sharing just a fraction of what he's taught me but I won't.. I will discuss the most important meeting I ever had with him, which is why I'm giving this presentation today.. 'Cause when I finally got the nerve to tell him I was burnt out and I needed a break, and how embarrassed I was that I failed, and his response, without the least bit of hesitation or anger, 'cause he was also an investor, was "I'm not surprised this happened.. "Many people go through this.. You didn't fail." He then shared a story with me of someone everyone in this auditorium would recognize, who also had to take some time off..

He told me I should take the time I need, that he thought that I'd come back and be stronger, but if I didn't that was okay, too.. That night, for the first time in a year, the weight on my chest got lighter instead of heavier.. Three weeks later, I took my leave of absence.. There is one place where I hit a home run, partly due to luck and partly due to my value of friendship.. In dealing and preparing for a burnout, it was a network of people that surrounded me...