5 Truths Every Visionary Founder Needs to Know Transcript

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Introduction to the superpowers and setbacks of visionaries

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Have you ever looked around your environment and been certain that there is a better way to do things? Sometimes this shows up as a spark of creativity or a new way of looking at things.

What is a visionary and why they see solutions

And in creative environments, that's welcomed. But in bureaucratic systems, it's sometimes seen as disruptive. I have always been a visionary, and if you have felt this way, you might be a visionary, too. Today, we're going to be talking about the superpowers that visionaries have and some of our biggest setbacks. I'm giving you five things to know about this wiring. What a visionary actually is, why rigid environments starve you, and the two traps set by your risk tolerance. We're also going to talk about the superpower nobody ever told you was a skill, and what to do with all of it. I know this wiring from the inside. I helped start a company that reached a nine-figure valuation in just 3 years, and it began as nothing but a vision. No product, no team, not a single dollar of funding. By the end, my hope is that you stop treating this part of yourself like a liability and start treating it like the asset it is. Number one, most people are complainers, but you see the fix.

The importance of seeing problems as opportunities

So, a mentor of mine once reorganized how I saw myself by saying, "Most people are not visionaries, they're complainers." So, if you think about any sort of example where maybe you're in the workplace and the schedule isn't working or something's going wrong, a lot of people complain about it correctly for years. They will just keep complaining about the same problem and talk about how it's not optimal. But a visionary really feels a pull instead. What if we did this differently? What if we made the whole process differently? What if it was built around the person that it's supposed to serve? And so, the deeper tell, if you're a visionary, you don't just see the problem, you start envisioning solutions. You're imagining and dreaming how something could be better. And you can almost live in the future where your solution exists and describe what it feels like there.

How environments can starve or support visionaries

I actually assumed that everyone's mind worked this way. It took years of feedback from people who I respect to learn that having a vision for everything is a rare skill to be cultivated. And this is how you spot another visionary. You give someone a new way to see a problem and they light up with 10 ideas of their own. These are my people. If you've recognized yourself already, you are one of them. I sometimes felt like this was a bad thing. Like people were like, "Can you just stop like coming up with new ideas?

Like can we just do it the way it's supposed to be?" And in some cases, that's true. We need to actually like follow standard procedures. But this is how we move the world forward and I think that being a visionary also comes with a significant amount of optimism. I would rather see a solution than a problem. The second thing to know is that rigid environments starve you. I Honestly, I trained in medicine and medicine runs on protocol for good reason. When the stakes are human lives, you really want to follow a checklist.

But rigid systems of every kind with committees and bureaucracies and processes that exist because they've always existed, they don't really have a slot for seeing how it could all work differently or work completely differently.

Risks and traps related to a visionary's risk tolerance

In highly structured environments, I often start to feel restricted or worse, ineffective, because the thing I do best is the thing that the system has no place for. This startup world felt like home to me the moment I found it because it was just wide open space to let your creativity run loose. And the whole job is redesigning broken things around actual human needs. If you've spent your career feeling like the disruptive one, there are entire industries where your exact wiring is actually incredibly valuable.

Number three thing to know is that your risk tolerance sets your trap. So, the same wiring that shows you one better future shows you a hundred constantly. I make ideas the way other people just breathe. My task list, it's not really a list. It's a backlog of just hundreds or thousands of things that I've thought of that could turn into something. And most of it will never get done. The best ideas rise on their own. I actually think of it like a garden.

The value of disruptive thinking in industries

Like I think of it as I've got this whole field of seeds I've planted and I've been thinking about them in different ways. And some of them are going to choke out and some of them will actually grow into something worth cultivating. And so, the first trap is a being a low-risk tolerance visionary is when every idea stays in your head. It's very vivid, but it's safe and it's unbuilt. And sometimes that can just eat at you for a lifetime. Trap two is if you are a high-risk tolerance visionary, this is when you jump on every single project because it's so colorful and wonderful in your mind and you just know it has to exist in the world. And then you look up and you have a pile of projects and no real execution. One honest confession from me that my team knows about me is that I genuinely cannot see how many steps something is going to take. I get in over my head because the vision arrives complete and the staircase to it does not. And some of my mentors have said, "Vision is cheap and execution is everything." Which I definitely believe that. My first company only became real because of the operators around it. I I joke that I just spew vision all over the place cuz I have a vision about everything. I can actually paint the picture of the end result and I had co-founders who were able to get that into a product and get that into a financial model that we could pitch. So, vision alone is not enough. But, plenty of people have visions and never act or they can't make anyone else see it. It's important to know your phase. So, I actually produce a lot and and very fast in the design phase when everything is just very imaginative, creative, and agile, I'm on fire. The minute it crosses over into operations where you're Okay, we have a plan now. It's all been checked off. Everyone's bought into it. Everyone can see the future and now we have to like hook things up and manage workflows, I lose steam. So, I lose my spark and I start to feel overwhelmed. I like to create things and that took me years to stop reading as a character flaw. So, my value lives at the beginning and that is a really legitimate place for value to live. The fourth thing you need to know about being a visionary is that storytelling is the superpower. A visionary can tell a story that makes people believe in something that does not exist yet. The earliest stage, you have no real product, no team, no funding, you have a vision, your reputation, your credibility, your track record, and your ability to bring something to life.

That's the whole list. And when you think about being an early entrepreneur and pre-selling your product, that sounds impossible to most people. How could I possibly sell something that doesn't exist yet? But, a visionary already knows the answer. To you, it does exist. You've lived in it. You've spent time in your mind in this future where this thing exists and your conviction is not a performance and and people can really tell. It does take more than just conviction.

Storytelling as a superpower for early-stage entrepreneurs

You have to know how to network, how to find the right people, how to be strategic about why certain people would be aligned in believing this vision and you run a real discovery process. Take the honest feedback and and flex the pieces of your vision that aren't going to work economically. The vision holds and the details can bend. So you can say, "Tell me everything that's wrong with this idea." You could talk to 10 different stakeholders of 10 different backgrounds and and get everyone's input on your vision. In this discovery process, you're painting a picture for them.

You're not selling anything yet. You want to really get feedback and be able to move and change your vision until it works for the right people. And so, I'll give you a proof point. The best part of my career arc where I was really adding the most value was in the incubation stage of my first company. We spent months designing the model, the

care, the story before there was anything actually tangible. It was really the strength of the vision and the team around it. We were able to actually pitch, sell, and sign a contract with nine figures with an incredible partner before we had a single employee. I just didn't even know that was possible. That you could sell a vision. The truth is, it's very easy to raise capital once you have a contract. If you can get the right stakeholders to believe in your vision as a founder, that is your absolute most important skill.

The process of selling a vision before product exists

It's important to say that we are really good at building things and designing things, but you have to have operators to be able to implement and scale. Visionaries and operators have to work really well together and you need both. The fifth thing I'm going to tell you is you don't have to fix your wiring. You can build around it. If you're a visionary, you don't necessarily need to go find like an ops partner tomorrow. You do need to realize that you shouldn't go investing in and starting 25 things without putting an operator in place for them. But I really don't think you should squeeze yourself into a role to do operations if what you're really good at is designing and envisioning things. There's a great book called Who Not How.

It's all about finding the right people to slot into your vision for what you're building because you're not going to do it with a how. There's not a technique that's going to be the way to get to the next level. The real value of building something is the people you put in place. It's good to know what you have inside of yourself and how it's a strength and what elements it actually really lends itself to what you're trying to do and and at what point this is something that is a setback for you.

The importance of building a team around your vision

And if you are hearing this and you hear this in yourself, ask yourself, what is your risk tolerance with all the ideas you have right now? Are they all locked in your head making you always feel kind of like wistful for something more? Or are you jumping on all of them and maybe your your calibration is too far in the other direction that you've wasted money and time on things that really just need to kind of cultivate in the garden a little bit longer. You need to stop treating the flood of ideas like a personal failing or ADHD. Sometimes I'm like, man, my brain is all over the place. But I have pretty good executive functioning, so I don't know if I have ADHD. I just have a lot of ideas. Just treat this as raw materials. Cultivate the skills that multiply it. Get really good at storytelling. Get really good at identifying who needs to buy into your vision and why would they buy into your vision? And create infrastructure around yourself on purpose. So, people near you who can take your vision and make it reality. I don't want you to try and self-improve your way into being someone else. But, you're not going to become a different kind of person. It actually took me several years to know what the difference was between a visionary and an operator and to stop feeling bad about the fact that I'm not an operations person. Here are the five things one more time. One, most people are complainers, but you see the fix.

That is optimism. That is building a better future. Two, rigid environments make you feel restricted and ineffective, and you're not wrong. Three, your risk tolerance can set your traps, so learn whether your ideas are dying inside your head or if they're scattered across 10 projects. Try and set a understanding of where you want that calibration to be. Four, storytelling is the superpower, especially at the earliest stage when a vision is all that you have. And then five, the move is never that you need to fix your wiring. You need to notice it, own it, cultivate it, and really build the infrastructure around it. The world has plenty of people who can tell you why something won't work. It has a lot fewer who can stand inside a future that doesn't exist yet and describe it well enough that other people follow them there. So, if you're in that group, you're that I deeply relate to and want to provide encouragement to you. If this episode felt like someone is finally describing you, I'd love to stay connected. You can go to startupphysicians.com to join our email list. You can also go to our resources tab and download some of our resources for founders. That's where I share what I'm building, what I'm learning, and come back for the next episode because I'm going to talk about the very first thing every visionary wants to do with a new idea, which is to build the product. There is a version of that story that ends with a beautiful product that nobody buys, and I've watched too many brilliant founders live it. I'm going to show you how to keep your creative fire and skip that ending.

Summary of key insights and encouragement for visionaries

Until then, keep seeing what other people can't, and it's the whole reason that you're here. Thanks for listening to the Startup Physicians podcast. This community was built for doctors who want to contribute to the future of healthcare.

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