

what I have learnt

(the hard way)

Highly acclaimed marketing expert Tony Surtees, prefers to avoid labels. If he had to nominate one for himself, it would be 'enterprise creator'. His particular ability is to assess changing marketplaces and pick future trends, uncovering opportunities. He lets us in on some tricks learnt so far in his glittering global career. By Jodie O'keefe

Build on your strengths, not your weaknesses.

We get trained as kids to identify our weaknesses and make up for them. That doesn't work. What we really have to find out is what we're not good at and what we really don't like doing, then discipline ourselves to cut it out.

Follow the 'Three E' Rule.

Do those things that are easy, effortless and that which provides you energy. These tend to congregate around your skills and what is natural for you. I learnt this idea from Michael Ray, Professor of Creativity and Innovation at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Business fundamentals never change.

The size of the organisation you work in only determines the tools you apply and the resources you need. The fundamentals of creating an enterprise don't ever change. The fundamentals of creating value for a customer, they don't ever change.

There is a clear distinction between leaders and managers.

A leader creates a vivid and clear picture of what the future will look like, explains how that future is better than the present and how to get there. A manager focuses on individual people and individual resources within the organisation to make that vision reality. In small organisations you often have to combine those two roles and manage the inherent conflict.

The 'people decision' is the most important.

Choosing the right people for the team consistently proves to be the most challenging, the most difficult but the most worthwhile business decision I make. The wrong people



will take the right idea and turn it into disaster. The right people will take the wrong idea and shape it and keep finessing it until it works.

There's no substitute for integrity.

Skill won't do it. Opportunity won't do it. Some people need to be micro-managed, others don't. You can work with both. The only people you can't work with are the ones who don't have the integrity to deliver on what they promise.

Believe in the individual.

Be prepared to spend time with them. See what they're naturally attuned to and where they may be running into roadblocks. Try to find if they're working in their area of strength, or trying to make up for a weakness. It's something most people can't explain for themselves, they don't have the objectivity. You learn it over time.

The ultimate test.

Does the enterprise that you create survive beyond your tenure? That's the ultimate test. No matter how much money you've made, if it doesn't survive you, then it's not a success. If you've created a legacy and you've created sustainable value, then you have a success. 

Tony Surtees was founding Vice President and General manager of Yahoo!'s Commerce Group, before transforming Chinese online auction site emaimai.com into an international mobile payment service. Now, as founder of Sydney-based Santa Clara Group, Surtees advises and invests in companies looking to establish commercial beach-heads in the United States, EC and Australasia.

Illustration: Sam Griffin