

The mouse hunter's guide to entrepreneurial success



In search of an infallible formula for success in business and entrepreneurship, pundits have trawled Jobs, Shakespeare, Sun-Tzu, and Machiavelli, among others, to explain why some entrepreneurs make it while other fail.

No one to date has thought to ask my dog. Yet Giada (pronounced Ja-da) can teach you everything you need to know about succeeding in business. She has become as successful in her realm as these other luminaries have been in theirs.

Giada is uncommonly good at hunting lizards and mice. She doesn't have a pedigree for this; she isn't a blue-blooded hunting dog, the canine equivalent of a Harvard MBA for hunting animals. She is a mutt from the pound, and not a young one at that.

What makes her so good is exactly what makes an entrepreneur—or any business or social visionary—succeed. She is:

Focused and fearless. You need focus to reach your goals, and the more ambitious the goal, the more focus you need. You have to be obsessive about it, to the exclusion of other distractions or demands on your time. Your obsession might damage your social relationships temporarily, and so be it. When Giada is stalking game, she isn't hungry or thirsty, hot or tired. She dislikes rain, but if she is on the trail of a mouse and it starts to rain, she has to be dragged

away. When hot on the scent, she doesn't want to play with other dogs, the opposite in fact: if they venture too close to "her" hunting turf, she becomes protective, snapping at dogs that are her playmates in other contexts.

She is fearless but attentive, like an entrepreneur venturing into a new market or introducing a new product. You have to be fearless when breaking new ground, but not recklessly so. You need the courage of your convictions, a gambler's willingness to risk but not to lay everything on one throw of the dice—fearlessness with finesse.

Giada throws herself into promising mouse holes without hesitation. But if she senses a strange smell, she will pull back, nostrils quivering, trying to clarify the situation. Instead of an innocuous mouse, she may be digging toward the entrance to a gopher hole, and she knows—instinctively—that gophers have sharp incisors that are dangerous for dogs.



She follows her instincts above all. She does not base everything on what she sees. She homes in on what she *feels* (in canine terms, that means mostly what she hears and smells). She is like a goalie during penalty kicks. The goalie decides which way to move as the ball is kicked, because one nanosecond later is too late. Either you block the kick or you fail completely, but you follow your instinct in either case. The entrepreneur has to do

the same. You make your moves based on what your gut tells you the market will do, because the market itself moves too fast for you to absorb the information in advance.

Eager and enthusiastic. Some entrepreneurs are motivated by money. They want to make money, they make it, and they lose their enthusiasm. Or they make more money as the proverbial way of keeping score, but they don't care anymore. That can't be said of Jobs or Bill Gates or Carl Icahn or Giorgio Armani.

Or Giada. When she senses prey within reach, her tail starts beating like a metronome. She can't contain her joy; she has to express it viscerally. She isn't motivated by food (the canine equivalent of money) because she doesn't eat her quarry. Once she has captured it, she has no interest in torturing or eating it. When it stops moving, she moves on to the next. Her satisfaction is the success itself, not the instrument of that success. She glories in the game, not the trophy. Similarly, true entrepreneur don't sit back and delight in their successes. They are always restless, moving on to the next opportunity.

Giada is open to all opportunities and will range wide in search of fertile hunting fields. But she always wants to start with fields she has already

explored. She will dig deep to tap familiar terrain. Known markets and actual customers are the most cost-efficient way to build a business. You can't limit yourself to those, but starting with where you have been and what you know is a good framework for expansion.



Patient and passionate. Patience is what most distinguishes Giada from most canines, including purebred hunting dogs with pedigrees. They may smell mice and lizards more keenly than she does, but they don't have the temperament to stalk and wait. She instead will sniff a mouse hole for hours, hoping that its occupant will make an appearance. She will wait patiently by a sunny wall, expecting that a lizard will emerge from its hiding place. She will painstakingly remove a bush, branch by branch

and root by root, that may be obstructing access to the wall or hole of her choice. She does this by digging, tearing, and detaching with her teeth. No matter how heavy the foliage or how long the wait, she is never discouraged. She doesn't quit.

Entrepreneurs don't usually excel in patience. But without it, Steve Jobs wouldn't have returned triumphantly to Apple after his 11-year exile. Many an electric car sputtered and died before Elon Musk succeeded with the Tesla. Walt Disney wooed Mary Travers for 20 years before she agreed to sell him the rights to *Mary Poppins*.

Obsessive focus is impatient, almost by definition. But without perseverance, an entrepreneur misses both short-term opportunities and long-term perspective. Need I point out that another word for patience is *doggedness*?

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