

Startups in 13 Sentences

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<http://paulgraham.com/13sentences.html>

*These are my personal notes. It's **not** a full transcript of the essay/article. It's **not** an official summary. If you like these notes I strongly encourage you to read the original source in the link(s) above.*

1. Pick Good Cofounders

Cofounders are for a startup what location is for real estate. You can change anything about a house except where it is.

2. Launch Fast

The reason to launch fast is not so much that it's critical to get your product to market early, but that you haven't really started working on it till you've launched.

3. Let Your Idea Evolve

This is the second half of launching fast. Launch fast and iterate. It's a big mistake to treat a startup as if it were merely a matter of implementing some brilliant initial idea.

4. Understand Your Users

As in science, the hard part is not answering questions but asking them: the hard part is seeing something new that users lack. The better you understand them the better the odds of doing that. That's why so many successful startups make something the founders needed.

5. Better to Make a Few User Love You Than a Lot Ambivalent

Initially you have to choose between satisfying all the needs of a subset of potential users, or satisfying a subset of the needs of all potential users. Take the first.

6. Offer Surprisingly Good Customer Service

Customers are used to being maltreated. Try making your customer service not merely good, but surprisingly good. Go out of your way to make people happy. They'll be overwhelmed; you'll see.

7. You Make What You Measure

Merely measuring something has an uncanny tendency to improve it. If you want to make your user numbers go up, put a big piece of paper on your wall and every day plot the number of users. You'll be delighted when it goes up and disappointed when it goes down.

8. Spend Little

I can't emphasize enough how important it is for a startup to be cheap. Most startups fail before they make something people want. A culture of cheapness keeps companies young in something like the way exercise keeps people young.

9. Get Ramen Profitability

"Ramen profitable" means a startup makes just enough to pay the founders' living expenses.

10. Avoid Distractions

Nothing kills startups like distractions. The worst type are those that pay money: day jobs, consulting, profitable side-projects.

11. Don't Get Demoralized

Starting a startup is a huge moral weight. Understand this and make a conscious effort not to be ground down by it, just as you'd be careful to bend at the knees when picking up a heavy box.

12. Don't Give Up

You can get surprisingly far by just not giving up. This isn't true in all fields. There are a lot of people who couldn't become good mathematicians no matter how long they persisted. But startups aren't like that. Sheer effort is usually enough, so long as you keep morphing your idea.

13. Deals Fall Through

It's very dangerous for morale to start to depend on deals closing, not just because they so often don't, but because it makes them less likely to.

Having gotten it down to 13 sentences, I asked myself which I'd choose if I could only keep one.

Understand Your Users	That's the reason to launch early
	Evolving your idea is the embodiment of understanding your users
	It'll push you toward making something that makes a few people deeply happy
	The most important reason for having surprisingly good customer service
	When everything else is collapsing around you, having just ten users who love you will keep you going