

# GAME DAY PARKING AND THE ROLE OF PASSION IN STARTUPS

DOC4 STARTUP KIT



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## GAME DAY PARKING AND THE ROLE OF PASSION IN STARTUPS

If you've ever been to a big sporting event or concert, you've dealt with the parking spot search routine. Sometimes you're early, sometimes you're lucky, and sometimes you end up sixteen blocks away in front of the dry cleaners.

For nearly ten years, I lived with some roommates in a house in between the basketball arena and football stadium at the University of Arkansas. In addition to the usual sports games, these venues also played host to a variety of events ranging from massive corporate meetings to high school and college graduation ceremonies.

This meant that our little house was smack dab in the middle of huge throngs of people desperately searching for a parking spot pretty much every weekend.

Fresh out of college ourselves and in need of cash to spend irresponsibly, we naturally decided to offer up parking spots in our yard for up to \$20 each. It worked like a charm – we raked in what amounted to tens of

thousands of dollars over the years.

Being on a college campus, our neighbors were mostly students. Which meant that we had new neighbors almost every semester. And when new neighbors arrived, they were invariably indifferent to our little parking operation.

When we asked if they were going to sell parking spots for the next Razorback game, they scoffed – “Parking cars on game day? That’s lame, we have better things to do...”

But before long, the new neighbors would get a knock on the door about 15 minutes ‘till kickoff, and open it to find a smiling fan decked in Razorback red, holding out gobs of cash just to pull up on their grass for a few hours.

Who could resist?

Next thing you know, our new neighbors would have two more cars parked next to the first one and enough cash to grab pizza and beer at halftime.

At the next home game, the converted skeptics would be standing in their yard and waving cars in. By the time conference play was heating up, they’d be setting

up lawn chairs nice and early to comfortably direct fans to premium parking spots.

Halfway through the season, many of our new neighbors were using sparklers and even hula-hoops to get the attention of potential customers, and offering incentives like drinks, snacks, clean bathrooms – the works.

The financial success they experienced with the first few games would magically convert them into the most passionate parking entrepreneurs you ever saw!

## WHAT PARKING CARS TAUGHT ME ABOUT PASSION

The neighbors had learned the same entrepreneurial lesson we had learned years earlier: discovering a lucrative product/market fit is almost always a ton of fun – even if the product or service is seemingly super boring – like providing parking spaces.

What parking cars taught me is that ‘passion’ is way overrated as a contributing factor to success. It taught me that your ‘passion’ can blind you to innumerable lucrative opportunities that are oftentimes right under

your nose – opportunities that you would actually become passionate about the minute they started bringing in a healthy income.

Another thing I noticed is that the money rolling in from our parking business was money happily and eagerly spent – the money was a reward people gladly offered us in exchange for helping them solve a problem in their life. I heard ‘keep the change’ after being handed a fifty far more often than I heard any kind of complaint about our price or service.

When people are stuffing cash into your hand while at the same time thanking you for being such a huge help to them, it makes you feel good. It makes you want to find other ways you can help them out.

It makes you passionate!

Put another way, people are passionate about far fewer things than there are problems to be solved. Think about it: how many things would you say you are truly passionate about? Maybe 2 or 3, tops?

Instead of looking first for ways to make money with the 2 or 3 things you’re passionate about, look instead at the nearly infinite ways you can truly help people.

If you land on something successful, the best case scenario is that you will become passionate about it the same way we did with parking. And the worst case scenario? You now have a source of income that will allow you to follow your (potentially less profitable) passions wherever they may lead.

If I had to boil it down to one Tweet-able lesson, it would be this: Passion follows success way more easily than the other way around!

## **PASSION: KEY TO SUCCESS OR PATH TO FAILURE?**

I take calls all the time from people who believe that because they have a great deal of 'passion' for what they are building, their success is all but assured. While I believe this idea has little (or no) relationship to reality, I can understand why so many would-be founders think it is the gospel truth.

People in the startup world are inundated with messages glorifying confidence, passion, and following your dreams. Sometimes we see articles like this one from Business Insider claiming, "Passion is the key to success".

Citing Yappn Corporation's CEO David Lucatch, the article states that passion "fuels confidence", "creates excitement", and is "contagious".

On the other hand, in a transparent confession, Hotjar CEO David Darmanin said that he used to be a huge believer that his passion would drive his success. So much so, that he almost had someone tattoo the word "Passion" onto his skin. (How's that for dedication??)

David Darmanin goes on to say that he had to spearhead two failed startups before he realized that "following your passion can lead you straight to a failed business."

So what gives?

CEO David Luctach says that passion is the key, and his venture was successful. CEO David Darmanin said that passion blinded him and led him to two startup failures. (And it's not like David Darmanin had less enthusiasm – he was at the tattoo level, for crying out loud!)

Which CEO is right? What is the proper role of 'passion' in a startup?



## THE (PROPER) ROLE OF PASSION IN A STARTUP

Don't get me wrong – I don't want to put a damper on your passion. Passion has a huge role to play in being a startup founder. Your passion for the solution you're offering will get you through many hard days and sleepless nights.

But your passion is not going to drive your success.

If anything, your passion for your solution is far more likely to drive you down a road of broken dreams because it can blind you to hard realities that you must face to become successful.

When I get these calls from folks who have stars in their eyes about their prospects for success, I find I'm often the first person they've talked to about their idea.

This can put me in an awkward spot when I can clearly see, for example, that there is no market for what they want to sell. Or that they don't have enough resources (i.e., money and time) to see the project come to fruition. Or that their idea is indefensible, or that they are simply too late and there are already tons of competitors.

And when I bring up these shortcomings, the number one response I get is, “You don’t understand – I’m passionate about this!” As if their passion will somehow make customers magically appear out of the clear blue sky.

What I wish they could see is what I saw with our neighbors in this real-world parking example. Our new neighbors were not passionate at all about parking cars... at first.

But they had a product (a place to park near the stadium), a market need (Razorback fans needing parking) and the right timing (football season).

They only became passionate about parking after they started solving problems for their customers. The new-found passion certainly fueled a greater effort to solve customer problems (like getting up early and offering creative incentives), but this passion came after their initial success.

To sum it all up, I’m not saying passion is useless or has no role in your startup, but you need to take your passion out of the driver’s seat. Your passion needs to take a backseat to the goal of finding viable solutions to real human problems.

Once you find a way to consistently do this, I assure you, passion will follow!

On a side note, a great way to keep your passion in check and ensure you're not missing any blindspots when working out a new startup idea is to use what's called the 'lean methodology'. If you're not familiar with this principle, check out our Lean Canvas white paper to learn more about this hugely successful tool for determining startup viability, and don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

PS: I've recently moved back to our old neighborhood, so if you need a parking spot for a game day, give me a shout. (\$20 easy-out, cash only, no refunds. ;)

## **ABOUT DOC4**

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*Thanks for reading*

**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR INQUIRIES**

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