

MAVERICKS AND MONGRELS

In my opinion, the best sort of entrepreneur is the maverick – the one with a bit of mongrel in them. People like Richard Branson, Ricardo Semler or James Caan who break the rules and have the tenacity to never give up, but just go forward. It's the underdogs and fighters I really resonate with.

Take Ricardo, for instance. He's a Brazilian entrepreneur who takes the definition of 'unorthodox' to a whole new level. He's got an engineering empire, but he's globally known for his radical methods of workplace 're-engineering'. He basically surrounds himself with employees who can choose their own salary and their working days. They make up the rules and because they're given this freedom, they don't take advantage of it. Needless to say, he's got a waiting list of people vying to get into his company.

Maverick entrepreneurs are great in that they turn the traditional concepts of business success upside down. Here's what they've taught me.

LESSON 1: you don't need an MBA

You see people go to uni, do their MBA and think they can follow particular rules and be successful. But you write your own history by breaking the rules. James Caan, the British-Pakistani entrepreneur, was told by his dad to 'observe the masses and do the opposite'. If things don't work out, well, you learn from your mistakes and move on. If you have trials and tribulations, you become used to picking yourself up. It's a fascinating journey. I personally don't follow a rule book. It might've been because I didn't grow up with wealth and didn't have a uni degree. And no one's ever asked to see one because I always deliver the results.

LESSON 2: you don't need to be ruthless

If you're working in a big company, you do need a bit of shrewdness. But if you start your own company, the brilliant thing is, you make your own rules. When you're running a small business, you need to be firm so you can protect your company and your team. But you don't need to be ruthless. What you're trying to uncover is a win-win situation for everyone. For example, you want a fair price when you're negotiating a sales deal, but you also want your suppliers to want to keep dealing with you in the long term. So don't try and screw people down to their last penny. Do the right thing. If you help people out, you'll bring their loyalty in. If people try to screw you, then it's time to bring out the mongrel in you, or just don't deal with them again.

LESSON 3: have fun

The other interesting thing about many maverick entrepreneurs is they make time to have fun. It's just not sustainable to work 18-hour days. I personally am so passionate about what I do that I don't ever plan to retire.

LESSON 4: give your money away

One thing about unorthodox entrepreneurs is they're philanthropists. It's inspiring to know that entrepreneurs can change the world. James Caan, for example, has set up a foundation which focuses on children's healthcare and schooling in places like Pakistan. I think it's great to have money to do things you want, but at the end of the day, I hope I will die poor because I've given it away to good causes.