

# LEVEL UP IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## DON MATTRICK'S TOP 10 TIPS

by Sasha Milam

**D**on Mattrick built a video game when he was 17 that made millions of dollars in royalties. At the same age, he co-founded a company, Distinctive Software, which many hail as the foundation of the video game industry in B.C. He oversaw substantial growth at Electronic Arts and later at Microsoft, with a 700 percent growth of Xbox 360's global user base during his time.

As you can imagine, the path he took to entrepreneurial success is not for the faint-hearted, the marginally committed or the under-caffeinated. In honour of being awarded Gustavson's 2017 Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year, Mattrick made a guest

appearance in the BCom entrepreneurship class last May. Mattrick talked with students about his own experiences as a young entrepreneur, emphasizing the mindset and work ethic that are needed in order to thrive in the start-up world.

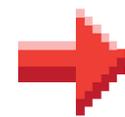


Peter Gustavson presents Don Mattrick with a pixelated trophy at the 2017 Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year Award gala.



### WORK HARD. HARDER THAN EVERYONE ELSE.

"I'm reminded of the persistence quote by Calvin Coolidge," says Mattrick. "There are so many great people who don't apply persistence and tenacity, and they don't end up achieving their potential, right? So I kind of grasped early on, as we were building the business, growing the team, that really what I was trying to do was compress time. If it traditionally took 30 years to build a career, I was trying to solve for: how could I do it in 15? What I realized was, I probably needed to spend 10 to 30 percent more time every day on work [than anyone else]."



### JUST START DOING THINGS.

"I knew early on I would need to land summer jobs and save money for university," he says. "And that motivated me through a whole set of experiences. Every summer I would try something, and then think about the following summer, and what would be better. That's how I got my first job with computers, working the retail floor at ComputerLand when I was 15.

"We also took that approach with our game development, early on at Distinctive Software. You just start doing things, building things, and some of it worked, and some of it didn't. The best way to find out if something is the right fit for you is to just start doing it."



### GET LUCKY WITH YOUR PARTNERS.

"My wife, Nanon, is very in touch with the EQ part of things. I, on the other hand, tend to approach things very much as an engineer. She'll say to me sometimes, 'hey, you need to slow down and communicate more, because no one understands what you're thinking.' Or sometimes, 'I can't believe you said that out loud!' Her coaching has been appreciated and good for my career and development."

In the business partner realm, too, Mattrick has found the perfect foil for his own talents in Paul Lee, the CFO of his first company and long-time friend. "There's a certain degree of luck required," he says. "Paul was seated beside me in grade eight math." Lee and Mattrick have since progressed from advanced-math-nerd-camaraderie to running multi-billion dollar companies together, but the friendship is still stronger than ever. "Being put next to Paul that first day of school, that was a blessing," reflects Mattrick.



### RUB SHOULDERS WITH THE SMART KIDS.

"Do as much as you can with as many bright people as you can, because that will accelerate your learning curve. And then hopefully you get some luck along the way, because it is a bit of a random event, to create something that is a hit. But if you get that and you're with a team, it's easier to recognize the second time around, the third time around, when that chemistry and energy is coming together. It's very analogous to being on a winning sports team. When everyone's showing up, practicing, playing their position, it just makes the desired outcome more likely to happen than not."



### FOLLOW YOUR PASSION.

"It was always easy to get up early in the morning, to work long days, because it never felt like work," says Mattrick. "For a young person who wants to be an entrepreneur, I would say follow your passion and find where it intersects with future market growth."



### DON'T AIM FOR LIFE BALANCE EARLY ON.

Want life balance? Don't be an entrepreneur. Mattrick took little time off during his 20s.



### OVERSUBSCRIBE.

Challenge yourself to do more than you think you can. You will build capabilities and confidence. "When I was in university, I did everything. I built games. I met new people. I went out. I didn't sleep much and I may not have gone to class as often as I was supposed to, but I studied and got my work done. So, oversubscribe, because that's how you meet the brilliant people, that's how you stumble across an idea that never occurred to you before."



### COMPETE.

There's nothing shameful about going for the win.

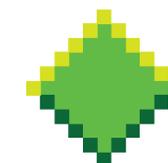
"America isn't any better than we are at math. No better at physics. It annoys me that more Canadian products aren't breaking through.

"All America does differently is set bigger goals and compete harder. We're every bit as capable of doing that here."



### MANAGE YOURSELF FIRST.

"Don't forget, people need hope. As the boss, you can't go to work on Monday and say 'we're all doomed.' The first person you have to manage is yourself."



### HAVE FUN AND APPRECIATE THE JOURNEY.

"Think of building and creating inside a frame of gratitude. It is a privilege to lead a team of people. Enjoy the successes and challenges each day."

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