

At 21, He Continues His Entrepreneurial Dream

Image: The protagonist being escorted out of the Y Combinator incubator.

Introduction

This live stream primarily narrates the second entrepreneurial journey of Li Zhiwei, the CEO of QuLive.

Work

When it comes to job hunting, we must be proactive. If we're not, the opportunity won't be ours. We need to ask: Can I intern at your company? Can I work at your company? Can you invest in or fund me? You have to try everything; not trying means failing. Back then, I felt I wasn't skilled enough, so I aimed to intern at their company. Since intern salaries and requirements aren't high, I got in. Once you're in, it's up to you to prove yourself. I started by developing an Android app, followed by an iOS version.

At work, the tasks your boss assigns are just the basics. Look for what the company hasn't done yet and take the initiative. While overtime might benefit the boss, it also benefits you. It makes transitioning to the next job smoother and enhances your skills. So, back then, I worked overtime to develop the Android version and some SDK work. That was the situation.

In my spare time, I dabbled in open-source projects. As programmers, we should share our projects with others. Just like producing a product for users or creating art for appreciation, sharing is beneficial. It invites feedback, whether positive or negative, and gradually builds your reputation in the tech community.

When others see your code, they trust your abilities. Share your work and engage with the community. This way, you'll know where the high-paying jobs are. For instance, my former boss, the CTO of Jumei, told me that directors earning millions is normal. I also learned from gatherings that Didi pays well, and Meituan is decent. So, engage with the community.

Entrepreneurship

So, how did I end up starting a business?

It was mostly an impulse. I teamed up with a few friends to create a product called CodeReview.

We organized an event. While we were confident in our product, we were clueless about renting venues since we were always coding. We sold over 80 tickets at 288 yuan each but stopped due to venue constraints. I had to scout for locations and negotiate rentals. For catering, I approached buffet restaurants, asking if they could cater for our 80+ attendees. In the end, I realized these tasks were simpler than they seemed.

Silicon Valley

The YC incubator is filled with young entrepreneurs, mostly around my age or slightly older, in their 90s.

I attended an NBA game. Since I didn't have much money, I bought the cheapest tickets in the last row with a poor view. By the third and fourth quarters, I sneaked down to the front rows to watch Curry and Paul up close.

As for YC, how did I get in? I sneaked in through a side door. With security at the front, I had to take the back entrance. This shows that if you're determined and willing to take unconventional routes, there are many shortcuts and flexible solutions in society.

So, if you want to see a celebrity up close, persistence can get you there, maybe even a conversation. Later, a YC manager escorted me out. While observing from the side was fine, I couldn't resist approaching the YC partners to listen in. They noticed I was an outsider and politely asked me to leave.

Later, I learned they sent an email criticizing my intrusion, stating that outsiders could steal ideas. So, there are consequences. If you dare to experience entrepreneurship at the world's top incubator, you might end up like me. I wasn't smart; I should have just listened from the sidelines and left.

Returning to China

Back in China, I started a training program and was invited to give tech talks. Reputation matters; having a portfolio helps others understand you. Gradually, I began networking with industry leaders.

Later, I worked at Ye Fei's company, someone who had rung the Nasdaq bell. Through my efforts, he welcomed me into his then 10-person team. To connect with influential people, you need to demonstrate your capabilities.

At work, I often engaged with them. During meals, I'd join the boss. In a company, the boss is the most influential person, so learning from them is crucial. Don't be afraid to interact with the boss; if you're diligent, they'll likely be open to conversations. At LeanCloud, I'd accompany the boss home, discussing how he became so skilled.

If the boss has time, engage with them. Don't shy away from conversations, but ensure you perform well. We often chatted till early morning, discussing their entrepreneurial journey and how they scaled the company. They started with a small investment, graduated from Beijing Normal University, were student council presidents, dabbled in various ventures, launched a cosmetics e-commerce site, competed with Jumei, merged, and eventually became vice presidents at Jumei.

How did I meet Hong Tao? At a deep learning seminar, I introduced myself briefly, highlighting my achievements. When networking with influential people, quickly showcase your strengths, even if you're not there yet.

At 21, you have potential. Always ask for a WeChat connection. Even if they don't respond, observing their moments can be insightful. By attending events and adding contacts, you immerse yourself in their world, motivating you to work harder.

How did I meet Jia Zhipeng? He wanted to intern at LeanCloud and reached out to me. Joining a reputable company attracts more connections. He's from Tsinghua's Yao Class, interning at Google and Microsoft, far more accomplished than me.

LeanCloud was in Microsoft's incubator, so I networked with other company founders, adding them on WeChat. For instance, I met Wang Run from Kungfu Bear and the founder of Geek Academy. When chatting, always mention mutual connections or your background to make the conversation efficient.

Your company's presence in an incubator helps you network with other founders. At events, identify the most influential person you can approach. In Beijing, numerous events provide opportunities to meet industry leaders. Observing their moments offers insights into their world.

How did I meet Xia Fang? She's a national role model for office women. She added me on WeChat after a live speech I gave. If your industry has events, gaining recognition through speeches or tech talks can expand your network.

How to Stay Ahead in Life?

In today's competitive world, staying ahead is challenging. At 21, being more accomplished than peers sets you up for future success. In school, excelling academically is crucial. Tackle difficult problems.

“Stay upwind” reduces to “work on hard problems.”

Why did I choose entrepreneurship over a stable job? I believe entrepreneurship is challenging, requiring me to create something widely used and build a team. Tackling difficult problems ensures growth. While a job offers stability, entrepreneurship teaches promotion and various skills.

What you do matters less than how well you do it. Whether programming or designing, take pride in excelling, not just the role.

In entrepreneurship, I strive for excellence. While I'm not solely coding, mastering technology is essential. Pursue what few can achieve.

The best protection is always to be working hard problems. Writing novels is hard. Reading novels isn't. Hard means worry: if you're not worrying that something you're making will come out badly, or that you won't be able to understand something you're studying, then it isn't hard enough.

Watching live streams is easy; creating one is hard. Before launching our platform, I streamed on Douyu, attracting around 800 viewers (though inflated, likely 200). Consuming content is easy; producing it is

challenging. Fear of failure drives improvement.

Should you constantly stress? Not necessarily. Overcoming challenges brings immense satisfaction. Balance simple joys with the thrill of conquering difficulties.

What's the essence of work? Post-graduation, the goal isn't just joining a company but becoming a producer. You must create value, not rely on parents. Whether in a company or not, the focus is on creation.

Pursuing a master's degree? Fine, but don't do it out of fear. At 19, as a sophomore, I ventured into the workforce, earning 15k monthly. Believe in your ability to secure a job post-graduation. Start with modest pay; I began with 4.8k as an intern. Don't let fear dictate your choices.

A job means doing something people want, averaged together with everyone else in that company.

A job entails creating value, selling it, and sharing the profits based on contributions.

For example, one way to make a million dollars would be to work for the Post Office your whole life, and save every penny of your salary. Imagine the stress of working for the Post Office for fifty years. In a startup you compress all this stress into three or four years.

Life demands earning a living. Imagine a postal worker earning a few thousand monthly, working decades to save a million. Alternatively, running a convenience store requires intense effort but can achieve the same in five years. The principle is clear: money requires effort. By working intensely, I aim to earn decades' worth of income in a few years.

I don't want to work 20, 30, or 40 years to earn slowly. By working hard, even if my boss won't immediately raise my salary, I'm building my future.

Do you need to be exceptionally skilled to start a business? Not necessarily. In IT, you don't need to be a genius. For instance, running a training program requires basic skills. Entrepreneurship is a mindset, not a skill level. Anyone can start a business, like teaching 小学生 as a 大学生. It's a choice to work intensely for a few years instead of decades.

Being a founder or partner means directly facing the market. Owning 30% of a billion-dollar company means 300 million. While it may seem ambitious, seeing friends succeed in Bitcoin or companies like Jumei gives me confidence.

To earn a billion, scaling a company from scratch or partnering in ventures is key. Early founders play crucial roles, earning significant shares. Starting a training program or leveraging a skill, like makeup, can lead to entrepreneurship.

A tip: Jumei's vice president isn't a hundred times more capable than me. His wealth comes from thousands of employees' efforts. Early involvement in a company's growth yields substantial rewards. To

earn big, embrace risks.

I haven't worked for a year, losing tens of thousands and investing my own money. Risks include health from overworking. Be prepared to take such risks.

Is Entrepreneurship About Getting Rich?

Honestly, during my startup phase, I survived on 30 yuan a week, eating onions and potatoes. My goal wasn't wealth but basic sustenance. Our initial aim is to earn enough to sustain our lives, then secure lifelong essentials like a house and car in Beijing.

Earning millions allows a work-free life, traveling the world, attending NBA games. It's about fulfilling basic needs and dreams.

Facing illnesses, having funds for treatment, or traveling the world are motivations. Everyone works to earn; consider entrepreneurship as an option. It's not about encouraging recklessness but evaluating if it suits you.

Working in a company is fine; I did it for a year and a half. Even there, work hard, learn from the boss, and prepare for entrepreneurship.

Economically, a startup is best seen not as a way to get rich, but as a way to work faster. You have to make a living, and a startup is a way to get that done quickly, instead of letting it drag on through your whole life.

Entrepreneurship accelerates solving life's basic needs, not just accumulating wealth. Regular jobs span decades; startups compress this into a few years. Everyone needs to survive, eat, and dress. I aspire for more, like owning a car and house. Thus, work intensely.

Entrepreneurship has benefits. Building a company is tough initially, but hiring and training employees can scale efforts. With 100 people, earning a billion becomes more feasible.

With only 30,000 yuan, I argued with my parents about quitting my 25k job to start a business. At 21, earning 25k seemed sufficient to them. However, delaying work to pursue entrepreneurship felt right.

Even if this venture fails, I'll continue. While it may seem risky, it's a wise decision. Despite having no money now, I know I can earn a million. Working a regular job lacked the drive; entrepreneurship fuels my motivation.

I believe in my ability to earn, even if I'm broke now. CEOs like Ma Yun or Wang Jianlin could lose their wealth and earn it back. As ordinary individuals, we have no choice but to 创业.

That concludes the speech.