



## Navigating a lonely road Fellowship, writes Jackson Hewett, makes all the difference

I remember as a kid watching my dad staring out the window of the converted picker's hut that was his office, surrounded by whiteboard markers, stacks of newspaper clippings and overdue bills, and a brass plate that read "a messy desk means success". He spent a lot of time there, waiting for the phone to ring, hoping the next call would be from that one big investor, that farsighted buyer, or a politician who bought into his dream for our district.

Dad had lots of good ideas but he was before his time, a farmer who cottoned on to organics and sustainability before it was trendy. He spotted the avocado craze – 20 years too early.

Entrepreneurs see opportunities we don't, and through sheer bloody-mindedness, it seems, set about trying to prove they're right.

Some are wrong, some have terrible luck,

some can't execute and so, sadly, very few make it. Fewer still make it big.

So my enduring memory of Dad is of him on that phone, talking not to the investor, the buyer or the politician, but to his brother in Melbourne, strategising for hours about what to do next or just getting a sympathetic ear.

We need entrepreneurs and more of them, particularly in Australia, where the rate of new business formation is in decline. Add to that a high failure rate and the more support we give to those who are giving it a go the better.

I never truly realised how lonely the entrepreneur's life was until I joined 20 of the founders pictured above on a global study tour last year to such companies as LinkedIn, Airbnb, Uber and Alibaba as part of Westpac's inaugural Businesses of Tomorrow program.

These entrepreneurs, ranging from their teens to their early 60s, were like kids on school camp. I don't think I've ever seen adults bond so quickly and so permanently. It was as if all those years of obsession and grind and the manufactured bravado required to keep it all going had been lifted, and a feeling of freedom and joyous curiosity took its place.

"For the vast majority of small businesses it's a very lonely affair and everybody gets self-doubt," says David Hodge, CEO of recycling business Plastic Forests. "Are we going to make it, is it really going to happen after millions of dollars spent? There isn't that support for small business, and you end up boring your wife and your parents, your children, to death about how important it is doing what you do. So I've found winning the Businesses of Tomorrow has helped me through a lot of pain."

Vikram Sharma, CEO of Quintessence Labs, a company that uses quantum computing for cybersecurity, also found the camaraderie hugely beneficial. "Growing a business is a very solitary journey, and having that group of people to share the challenges and experiences is very comforting and affirming," he says.

A softly spoken, humble man with two masters degrees and a doctorate, Sharma was also moved by meeting the founders of Airbnb and LinkedIn. It helped him confirm that the stereotype of hard-charging leaders crashing or crashing through was more myth than reality.

"They told us of the importance of valuing and fostering your corporate culture during high growth. Sometimes that can take a back seat, and where that cultural element comes second to the focus on growth, growth plans can be impacted. Uber was an example of that."

Hodge and Sharma have already seen opportunities expand since they entered the

program. Hodge's recycling company is now in the box seat thanks to the Chinese government's decision to ban the importation of waste, and is fielding calls from major corporations around the country. Quintessence Labs has increased its staff from 40 to 60, and opened operations in the US and UK. Last month it was named as one of the World Economic Forum's tech pioneers for 2018 – an exclusive cohort that has included the likes of Google, Spotify and Atlassian.

Other members of the group have also used the program to expand their horizons. Will Davies, CEO of the peer-to-peer car-sharing platform Car Next Door, completed a successful capital raising of more than \$5 million by refining his pitch and selling a global vision. "This trip has freed my mind from thinking 'buy us now for \$100 million' to 'we're world class with this amazing technology'," he says.

Hana Krawchuk, whose company Love to Dream makes swaddles that let babies sleep with their arms up, is on track to reach \$100 million in revenue and thinks she can triple in size after securing Target in the US as a customer. She used consulting support via the program to assess the potential of the business.

The 2017 Businesses of Tomorrow participants are going from strength to strength, and drawing strength from each other. A WhatsApp group buzzes with updates, questions and encouragement daily, and the members regularly meet to swap ideas and problems and to just be themselves.

David Hodge has this advice for those about to enter the program: "Bond quickly and openly – no non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements. Get open, get honest and get into the sharing." And get into a WhatsApp group of supportive peers. If anyone has one around sustainability start-ups, my dad would love to join. **D**

### Superdraft

Qld, Professional, scientific and technical services

Leading architecture firm offering complete house design solutions for residential or commercial projects of any size

### Swipe Health

NSW, Professional, scientific and technical services

A new model of pharmaceutical digital communications aiming to improve healthcare education among providers and patients

### Tablo

Vic, Information media and telecommunications  
Create and publish beautiful books, online and in paperback, to many retailers the world over

### Tap into Safety

WA, Education and training  
Health and safety training software and apps helping organisations engage workers and reduce injuries

### Teach Starter

Qld, Education and training  
Making classrooms buzz with time-saving resources for primary school teachers, including unit and lesson plans

### TeleMed

WA, Healthcare and social assistance  
Providing telenuclear medicine services to rural and remote communities, focusing on cardiology and oncology

### The Bread and Butter Project

NSW, Manufacturing  
Artisan bakery reinvesting profits into baker training and employment for refugees and asylum seekers

### The DPoA Group

Professional, scientific and technical services  
Providing premium customer service in novated leasing and salary packaging for both employers and employees

### The Impact Suite

Qld, Other services charity and not-for-profit  
Helping ethical charities build trust with donors, build fruitful relationships and create great impact

### The New Royals

Vic, Professional, scientific and technical services  
"The most interested creative agency in the world" producing arresting work generating cultural currency among consumers

### The Social Science

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Specialist knowledge for optimising social media in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine

### Throat Scope

NSW, Healthcare and social assistance  
Unique medical device for depressing the tongue – lights up in the mouth illuminating throat, palate and teeth

### TM Insight

Vic, Professional, scientific and technical services  
Specialist consultancy with in-depth industry experience in supply-chain management and industrial property development

### Touchpoint Technology

NSW, Other services  
Buying and selling new and refurbished IT hardware, leasing, secure data destruction, recycling and repairs

### Transit Systems

Qld, Transport, postal and warehousing  
Operating public bus services on behalf of state governments, transporting 60 million passengers a year

### Travello App

Qld, Other services  
App enabling travellers everywhere to connect, sync plans, create events, request help or make suggestions

### Trend Lighting Co

NSW, Manufacturing  
Collaborating with designers, architects and engineers to provide unique lighting systems for businesses

### Truck Dealers Australia

SA, Information media and telecommunications  
Online classifieds for buying and selling transport equipment, built by dealers, for dealers

### Turbine MachineGenes

Qld, Professional, scientific and technical services  
Research and development entity for technologies that enable machines to understand and control complex systems

### Unbound Global

Vic, Education and training  
Social enterprise working with universities to provide overseas educational programs connecting students to vital global issues

### UrbanYou

NSW, Information media and telecommunications  
A quick and easy way to book trusted house-cleaning and garden maintenance

### V2i Realtime and V2i Group

Qld, Information media and telecommunications  
Creating 3D visualisation and software products for the mining and resources, health and eLearning sectors

### Viewport

WA, Professional, scientific and technical services  
Digital studio producing world-class virtual reality and augmented reality applications and immersive 360-degree visual experiences

### Virtual Legal

Qld, Professional, scientific and technical services  
Fixed-fee online law firm using technology to provide a broad range of legal services

### Workbox Safety

Tas, Administrative and support services  
Cloud-based health and safety software for maintaining safe systems of work and managing legislative requirements

### WorkingMouse

Qld, Professional, scientific and technical services  
Software developers who partner with clients to transform ideas into commercially viable apps and businesses

### Yume Food

Vic, Wholesale trade  
Wholesale marketplace for quality surplus food, connecting suppliers who have surplus products with buyers

### ZiggyLabs

NSW, Professional, scientific and technical services  
Research-led start-up focused on a blood cancer in companion animals, particularly golden retrievers and German shepherds