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# Paul Douglas's Fine Line

Paul and I talk about the fine line between madness and genius when it comes to risking it all for your ideas. **BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER**



**MINNESOTA LOVES PAUL DOUGLAS.** For years the popular meteorologist has shared his weather forecasts and sense of humor on television, on radio, in newspapers and in magazines. However, today Paul is one of the foremost entrepreneurs in the nation. He sold his last company for \$45 million—but that's not even the story. His reflections and philosophies on business and life are what we should truly take note of.

## **SS:** Have you ever put it all on the line to make a deal happen?

» In the early '90s, when I started the three dimensional weather graphics company EarthWatch, I was financing it off my credit cards. At one point, the repo man showed up at the front door on a Sunday morning to take my Saab Turbo away. That's when my wife told me she was going to take over the credit cards and the ledger.

Also, when I launched Digital Cyclone, at one point we went from 50 people down to four, and had a burn rate of \$500,000 a month—that was in the era of get big fast. We put a second mortgage on our home in order to make payroll.

## **SS:** So would you do it again? Would you risk everything?

» I'm an entrepreneur, which means I have an itch that a scratch won't reach. But I don't think I would put everything on the line again or risk everything. I am more strategic, more calculated today. I don't believe in literally spinning the roulette wheel. That's gambling and that's what you do in a casino. There's a lot less

chance of failure when you can nudge the outcome and aren't at the mercy of the house.

## **SS:** What do you think is the biggest issue that entrepreneurs face?

» There is one missing ingredient—it's confidence. There are a lot of smart people out there, but somebody has to give them a confidence transfusion where they finally say they're going to give it a shot. For me, I was lucky in retrospect that I was able to keep my day job on TV and pay the bills. But I want people to remember that if they aren't ruffling feathers, they probably aren't making changes. Oh, and don't forget to surround yourself with really smart people.

## **SS:** What are your thoughts on the importance of intellectual property and protecting your ideas?

» In the wise words of my attorney, "Patents are the sport of kings." That's valuable advice that has served me well. Protect your ideas! But you can't rely on your patents alone. The things that can't be copied or cloned are creativity and innovation.

## **SS:** Was there a defining moment in your entrepreneurial career that was so significant that you've carried with you over the years?

» I was at a venture capital conference in 1999. I gave my elevator pitch about my personalized weather idea. As I walked back to my seat, I could hear one of the venture capitalists snickering at me. The guy said to the others he was sitting with, "This guy thinks people are going to pay for weather information. Paul Douglas is nuts!" The rest is history because this comment stuck with me and I was intent on proving him wrong.

## **SS:** So, Paul, tell me how close are you to the next big thing?

» We are three or four months away. This idea is gonna be big. Real big. Stay tuned. Weather is crying out for new, innovative ideas. We are working with chief meteorologist Belinda Jensen at KARE-TV to create an on-air laboratory type of environment. That brings up a good point about mentorship. Belinda interned for me and now we are partnering in business. Wow.

## **SS:** Do you have any advice you would like to share with our readers and future entrepreneurs?

» You have to be a little crazy, take leave of your senses, in order to hit a home run. I believe most people have at least one business in them. Gain your confidence and go for it. ☺

« Steven Schussler (steven@schusslercreative.com) is the Founder, Chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc., which specializes in creating, designing and developing theatrical attractions, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment venues worldwide.