All Companies Die; Not All Companies Really Live

Why yes, I did just make a *Braveheart* reference there.

People in the startup world often have the end of their companies on their minds. Staying alive and staying afloat is half the battle for any small company.

Hell, even big companies worry about it. Avoiding loss – and especially avoiding the big loss of shuttering a company – is especially important to us when our egos have grown around our work.

But what most people don't tend to accept is that all companies eventually do die – even the big ones. Walmart will one day cease to exist. Even Amazon.com will one day go the way of the dodo. It's happened before, and it will happen again. Your company may last for a long time if you run it right, but you cannot hope for immortality. That wish won't be granted.

If that's true, why do we let the thought of "go[ing] quiet into that good night" bother us so much?

You have to ask yourself: given that your company will one day fail, what will you do until that day comes?

So many companies answer by allowing loss aversion to keep them in the shallow water. They choose well-trodden paths and highly saturated markets. High competition and commoditization force them to operate at or near break-even. They will never get from 0 to 1 – there crowning glory might be a local television feature. They won't rock the boat. They may be stable companies, but they probably won't create a whole lot of wealth for society.

Contrast this attitude to that of the companies that do change the world.

They try to bring the world's most powerful machines to people's homes for an affordable price. They create the concept of ridesharing. They deliver food to you via drone. In other words, they do things which are kind of crazy. As a result, they don't fight competitors on price. They create huge amounts of wealth in untapped markets. They grow at a breakneck pace, and they frequently rock the boat. But they're far from stable.

Which kind of company would you rather be?

Peter Thiel observes in his book *Zero to One* that all really successful companies have a "secret" which only they know – an insight into the market which allows them to capture

wealth other companies can’t see. Without that secret, a business is just a bad game.

Secrets, Thiel argues, are only for companies (or technically, founders) that aren’t too afraid of loss:

> *“If your goal is to never make a mistake in your life, you shouldn’t look for secrets. The prospect of being lonely but right—dedicating your life to something that no one else believes in—is already hard. The prospect of being lonely and wrong can be unbearable.*

Listen to Thiel. Don’t fear your company’s demise to such an extent that you fail to do something great with that company – whether that’s creating tangible wealth or intangible wealth. Keeping your organization alive is only worthwhile insofar as it lets you do great things.

All companies die. Not all companies truly live.