

THE FOUNDER'S TIGHTROPE

Alignment is the Founder's tightrope. It occurs when the way we express ourselves outwardly mirrors our internal experiences, core values, beliefs, and sense of morality. To live in alignment translates to living each day in a manner that is consistent with our highest self and greatest potential. In essence, it is the daily practice of being true to ourselves.

Yet truth is a delicate line to walk.

If it were easy, we'd all be doing it, all of the time. To go against the masses, to keep your head up even when it looks like you're about to be trampled—this requires tremendous courage. It can feel like you're struggling uphill (exhausting in and of itself) while also having to dodge the stones that other people throw at you. Truth does not always have a pretty face. It can invite social censure, admonition, and disrespect from those who won't contemplate what they refuse to manifest within themselves.

Most of us have never objectively considered the trajectory of our lives. We don't "waste time" in pausing to contemplate the meaning of our endeavors. The purpose of school is not to educate, but to indoctrinate. We are trained to know enough to function and to follow the beaten path, and many of us never dare to rise above our assigned station in life. We are engineered by public education, peer pressure, societal assumptions, and the mentality of our family. We are placed rudely on the slow but "unerring" traveller of reasonable expectations. One of these expectations is that we attain gainful employment—*gainful* meaning "financially fruitful" and "useful".

In this mindless process, we abandon the precious ability to think creatively. We stop imagining. We stop dreaming. Our very neurological frameworks are affected, as they are by any circumstance. The cognitive pathways from which original thinking sprouts are "sensibly" pruned down to one main root: we must do as we are told, and do what is expected of us.

No wonder we are possessed by anxiety and boredom.

No wonder we're plagued with emptiness, with feelings of meaninglessness.

When we build our lives along the templates of others, we're flooded by disappointment and disbelief when our expected outcomes fail to materialize. Worse, we do not try to find the origin of the water to shut it off. We just don a flimsy raincoat of "practicality". If we complain about getting wet, we are told to bite the bullet and wait for the bad weather to pass. We tumble off the tightrope, unwilling to battle against the rain and wind.

Do you see? There is no action more radical than speaking the truth when no one else wants to.

This is the outcome of living by example. Transform your very existence into a fearless manifestation of the truth. Many people say they uphold the truth or prefer it, but very

few have the bravery or focus to make it their constant compass. When people who exhibit minimal confidence and courage encounter someone who has escaped the mental matrix, it triggers their anger. This anger can take the form of derision, disregard, or even direct offense. These attackers—and the attacked, should they decide to submit to victimization—condemn themselves to living by the wishes of others.

You and I both know that that's no way to live.

The best escape from such a fate? Self-education. More than ever before, knowledge is power. In order to conquer the world, you must first conquer yourself. You conquer yourself by understanding yourself. We could replace *conquer* with any number of verbs—*influence, understand, communicate with, respect*, and so forth. It doesn't matter what you call it, as long as you realize that it begins from within. Success is a matter of effort, but you must be positioned to receive it without sabotaging your own endeavors. If you can get out of your own way, your efforts will lose their inertia.

It'll take hard work, focus, and self-discovery, but you *will* ultimately reach the point where excellency becomes effortless.

So begin with yourself. Understanding the inner machinations of your own mind allows you to draw upon those inner drives. Face the emotions that cause you to procrastinate or feel paralyzed. By delving deep, you uncover their source. Maybe it's a fatalistic view of effort versus reward. Maybe it's a fear of success, paired with a fear of the unknown (*then what?*).

Be the change you wish to see. It's a cliché because it's true.

When It Feels Right, You're Doing It Right

Have you ever felt “in the zone”? Or “in sync” with yourself and what you were doing? Ever felt you were “on a roll”?

Of course you have. And thus you've had yourself a taste of alignment. It is the act of being in sync with your values. It's the meaningful progress towards some worthy goal, and the pleasure derived from doing so. It pairs the meaningful destination with the inspiring journey. Founding is supposed to be a joy, not an ordeal.

If it feels like torture, you're doing it wrong.

If it feels like torture, stop immediately and recalculate. Look for the origin of discord. Your hard work should be paying off and should be conducted with excellent team players. It must not be a matter of war or even drudgery. It's like playing contact sports. That's what it will feel like when you're doing it right.

☒ Gaining aligned momentum = increasing the likelihood of a **breakthrough**.

☒ Losing aligned momentum = an invitation for a **breakdown**.

Getting there requires patience and flexibility. You are not a fixed object. Most of the cells of your body are replaced every few years. You are constantly influenced by your surroundings: the people with whom you interact, the ideas and beliefs you are exposed to, the information you gather and gain. And if you've forgotten how much progress you've already made, then stop and ruminate over this: think of things you've accomplished in the past which seem inconceivable to you today. I can promise that you will continue to surprise yourself in the future. And although there may also be things that make you cringe today with embarrassment, shame, or regret, these are in the past. Now they serve as lessons. Keep what you are proud of; let go of the rest to make room for something better.

Cultivated self-knowledge relates directly to the development of a greater inner virtue. Development begins with **awareness**, and awareness should foster action. By beginning to envision and comprehend what is ideal for us, we are allowed to strategize our way to success. You can't correctly aim an arrow unless you first spot the target.

Self-Growth: That Which Is Green Is Not Rotten

As a Founder, it is essential to remember that everything begins and evolves with personal growth. The growth of your venture cannot sustainably outgrow your personal rate of growth. As a Founder, you are the heart of your venture. You are ultimately accountable for every decision, every responsibility, and every dilemma.

No matter how skilled and brilliant you may be, you can still be mired by the dangers within and around you. Weaknesses could include a flaky integrity, emotional immaturity, or clouded perception. Such weaknesses are deadly. An empire that took decades to build can be torn asunder in a heartbeat, with those exact weaknesses often at fault.

The key is to keep evolving, to keep growing, and to keep striving towards your potential. You can't remain stable or static. What got you this far isn't enough to get to the next level. The trick is to always keep growing. Do not rush yourself into growing ripe. Think of fruit. What happens when a fruit stops growing? It ripens, then falls from the tree. And then? If it is not immediately eaten, it rots.

Just a reminder: rot is a prelude to death.

By continually investing in yourself, you will gain the strength to attain the goals you set, and you will take the company with you to where you dream it can go. Your increased capacity will be a compounding asset that drives your business forward. On the other end of the spectrum, the struggle to get a company off the ground will naturally cause you to grow in a huge range of ways. Flex your emotional grit, your stoicism, and your values as you would your muscles. The more you work them, the more they will strengthen as you face and overcome struggles.

This is not a linear process. Your patterns of growth will vary. They depend on your thirst for knowledge, your mastery of self-control, and the ensuing development of your own self-discovery. How you choose to read into to your experiences will cause you to turn towards the light (reason, justice, and principles), or away from it (self-aggrandisement, greed, and unprincipled behaviour).

Remember that life is 5% what happens to us, and 95% how we react to it. Founders are not moulded by their circumstances. By reading into them, they mould the circumstances themselves.

The Dance of the Open Palm

There is a concept in ancient Taoist tradition called *Wu Wei*. It's been translated as *action without governance, doing without controlling, or action without willful effort*. And this just may be the secret to influencing greatness in the world.

Wu Wei is the dance of life. Although you may have never stopped to consider it, you practice this concept in small ways every day. It's when you wait for traffic to pass to cross the road, instead of stopping the flow. You practice it when you weave amongst the crowd in tune with its motion instead of pushing yourself against other people's bodies and elbows. It's what keeps a conversation running smoothly and allows for dialogue instead of a mess of selfish interruptions.

The opposite approach is to smash one's might and willpower against the world and its inhabitants. To get one's own way in a zero-sum game of winners and losers. And if somebody always loses, it's always a hollow victory. Picture the two approaches this way: one hand that can choose to curl into a fist or unfurl into an open palm.

**“Try to change it and you will ruin it. Try to hold it and you will lose it.” –
Lao Tzu**

Just as there is an equal and opposite reaction to an applied force in Physics, there appears to be an equal and opposite reaction to the application of Economic Force. Have you noticed? **Economic Force** (a.k.a. **Economic Violence**) is any situation in which any economic actor is prevented from trading freely by laws and statutes, although that person is not himself/herself committing fraud, deception, or violence.

Examples include:

- Welfare systems that redistribute wealth, while simultaneously damaging local infrastructure and preventing the most vulnerable from entering the workforce.
- Charities that give away goods (i.e. clothing) can destroy domestic markets and thereby, in the long-term and in general, create even less favorable circumstances even for those receiving aid.
- Price restrictions on goods that are in short supply, since these cause those goods to disappear (mainly into underground markets, where risk of doing

business increases prices further). If these goods are essential foods, such a scenario—if unchecked—could even engineer famine.

- Prohibition of prostitution or illegal pharmaceuticals, forcing all parties involved into a dangerous underground lifestyle and turning honest citizens into criminals—all in the name of protecting the people.

This is not a simple boomerang effect; they aren't completely unintended consequences. I suspect that there is something more to it, some underlying universal principle that keeps this ugly imbalance in place. Something in system mechanics ensures that applying Economic Violence to a situation always leads to a worse overall outcome in the long run. An eye for an eye leads to more blindness; a fistfight for a fistfight leads to more casualties.

The Fist is violent, hoarding, snatching, and adept at playing a sleight-of-hand. The Fist is ugly and un-original, limited in its brutish utility. The Fist denies, then threatens, then wounds. Violence denies morality and the pursuit of meaning. The only way to affect good in this world is through means which eschew the initiation of violence.

The Open Palm practices giving as well as receiving, freely and honestly. It is the touch of an artisan; a tickle, a tinkering, a subtle influence that can manifest great change if leveraged with finesse. It is an invitation to hail, to trade, and to dance. To Dance is to co-create the next great wave, and to surf upon it as it begins to take form. It is not to be found in the surly Fist that tries to grab onto it after it happens. To Dance with an Open Palm means moving in harmony with the swirling eddies of our world.

It is the same human hand. It's how you use it that matters.