

FROM THE FOUNDER'S HUB

How the Founder's Journey Is a Lot Like Fly Fishing



Building a company is almost as hard as convincing a 22" wild brown trout to eat a fake bug on a pointy hook and make its way into your net. In fact, there are many parallels between a founder's journey and fly fishing—two subjects I'm incredibly passionate about.

Product/Market Fishing

Whether or not you've experienced a slow morning on the water changing fly after fly, desperately rummaging through your fly box to find a pattern that works—you probably know the feeling. It's a lot like the early days in a startup when you're searching for **product/market fit**. Fish, like customers, provide clear feedback on your offering – they eat (or buy), or they don't.

Iterating over and over to build the product that your customers actually want is hard work. But like obscurity (or maybe **the offside rule**), you know it when you see it. There is no better realization, on the water or in the office, than finding that fit and finally getting off to the races.

Tackling Risk

"Don't leave fish to find fish" is common and practical advice for an angler.

We're all tempted to see what lies beyond the next bend in the river, even if the fishing is good exactly where we stand. As founders, we're faced with this dilemma every day. I have never met a founder who is short on ideas; but the challenge of scaling a startup can really be summed up as making constant tradeoff decisions with limited resources.

Despite the easy maxim, though, in practice this one isn't so black and white. Sometimes you do need to walk away from that perfectly decent pool of willing fish to hunt for the real prize upstream. **Sometimes it is critical for the company's future to invest in new products or markets, even when business as usual is going just fine.** The judgment of the great angler and the great entrepreneur lies in knowing when to take calculated risks and go after the bigger prize, even when it means stepping away from the comfort of a formula that's working.

Casting Your Attention in the Right Direction

As I see it, there are two main factors for success on the water. First, you need to fish well and fish hard – execute your casts skillfully, focus on a nice drag-free drift, and stay attentive to your fly, setting the hook methodically so that you don't miss bites.

This is true for a founder as well. Building a company is incredibly hard work and the hours and effort do matter; you really can run laps around your competition (especially the established incumbents) by outworking and outproducing them.

But then there's the other part of the equation: you need to be fishing in the right spot. No amount of work or skill can put a fish on your fly if you aren't putting the fly where the fish are. Lazy anglers and lucky beginners can land trophy fish while experienced fishermen take a zero on the same river. Doesn't seem fair, does it? Keep this in mind as a founder.

Sometimes, you just can't work or think your way out of a bad market or the wrong strategy. Focusing your attention in the right direction is often more important than how quickly or efficiently you move forward. It is important to make sure you are putting your energy where the fish are. When you do that, and combine it with hard work and skill, you are unstoppable.

Catching a Winner at Exit

The fish of a lifetime is both entirely expected and completely unpredictable. It's a lot like having a successful exit as a founder. Both are the culmination of years of effort, a smart strategy, and a skill set refined over time. When you do the right things, day after day, and year after year, success really is inevitable. But it's impossible to know in advance that this cast will be the one – which means that when opportunity strikes you have to be prepared to capitalize on it.

All fishermen have stories about “the one [or, for some of us, many] that got away.” As a founder, you likely won’t be so lucky as to have many shots at the big one. When a window opens for a life-changing exit, you need to recognize it and execute with all your focus and attention. You have been working all your life to get to this moment, and this is the time to claim your trophy.

Ready to find that once-in-a-lifetime catch? ScaleView has the expertise you’ve been looking for.

[Talk to a partner today.](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GABE WILCOX

Gabe is a co-founder and Partner at ScaleView Partners where he leverages his experience as a founder, advisor, investor, and executive to help other founders achieve their goals through liquidity events and capital raises. Prior to ScaleView, Gabe was founder and CEO of MineralSoft, the leading SaaS company for energy asset management.



PARTNER

GABE WILCOX
(512) 675-3000

gabe@scaleviewpartners.com



PARTNER

JAY SNODGRASS
(512) 879-6464

jay@scaleviewpartners.com



PARTNER

JORDAN DAVIDSON
(512) 883-8000

jordan@scaleviewpartners.com

