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100 Founders Share Their Top "Aha" Moments -- Guess How Many Jobs They've Created So Far?

Prepare to be stunned. Recently, I [took issue with news reports](#) questioning the role of small business as a source of new jobs. I summed it up with a remark from **Jim Clifton**, the Chairman of **Gallup**, from his new book [The Coming Job Wars](#):

“What the U.S. needs more than anything in its quest to win good new jobs in its cities is that rare talent [entrepreneurship] to start companies or to create new business models that work, that grow organizations—big ones, small ones, medium-sized ones, sustainable ones.”

To test my assumptions further, my associate **Cheryl Conner** issued [an invitation last week](#) to successful founders (whose companies survived 5 years or more). We asked them to share the pivotal “aha” moments that solidified their decision to go forward and has set the direction for their entrepreneurial career.

The responses floored us. In less than 24 hours, more than 200 company founders responded. Their stories amazed us. The sheer numbers astounded us even more. While I am one of the strongest proponents of startups, the sum was astonishing even to me.

Granted, this is unscientific data. We compiled the stories and totaled the job results of the first 100 who were able to finalize their stories with us within the space of a day. If we missed your story, we’re sorry – feel free to include it in comments. If we included less than you hoped to tell us, feel free to make those additions in the comment section as well. Already, this compilation is beyond anything I have published here yet.



These 100 entrepreneurs have shared the pivotal moments that set the direction for their companies and for their entrepreneurial careers.

Several (12) of the companies were younger than 5 years, but because they responded with such compelling stories, we let their submissions remain (although they have been noted with an asterisk.)

So clearly this is not a pristine statistical survey. However, it is my hope that it will leave you inspired. Are you ready? The 100 firms we present to you today have collectively created a total of **69,224** jobs. This is not a typo. These 100 “aha’s” have very literally led to the creation of **692 jobs apiece**.

Here are their stories. I welcome your responses. If there is sufficient interest, I will consider a sequel. Enjoy!

1. Jim Bodden, 1-888-WOW-1DAY! Painting, 100 jobs, www.wow1daypainters.com

I was seeking a way to differentiate my painting company from the others. My “aha” moment came when I realized that speed without sacrificing quality was the answer. People hate having their homes taken over by painting crews so why not complete painting project in one day? If two painters can paint 10 rooms in 5 days, why not get 10 painters to paint the same 10 rooms in one day?

2. Chris Sloan & Carla Kaufman Sloan, 2C Media, 350 jobs, <http://www.2cmedia.com>

Our “aha” moment came when we figured out we could leave the craziness of showbiz in Los Angeles and start our own entertainment studio in Miami, a move many thought was crazy, but here we are now one of the largest independent TV production entities outside of Los Angeles and New York.

3. Matt Fifer, 8th & Walton, 25 jobs, www.8thandwalton.com

My “aha” moment came from watching supplier teams that were struggling to grasp the fundamentals of doing business with Walmart. In 2006, I founded [8th & Walton](http://www.8thandwalton.com) and began training and consulting Walmart’s supplier teams all over the world.

4. Tarek Fadel, AdaptiBar, 8 employees, www.adaptibar.com

While sitting through a lecture-based bar exam prep course, I was desperate to find a better way to study. My “aha” moment happened when I withdrew from the exam to develop a personalized, adaptive tool. I used my own program to pass on the first try, and now thousands of students worldwide benefit from AdaptiBar.

5. Alan Dabbieri, [AirWatch](http://www.airwatch.com), 800 jobs, <http://www.air-watch.com>

When I watched Steve Jobs reveal the iPhone at Macworld, I knew that device would dramatically change the way people interact and the way businesses operate. We immediately recalibrated our operations to manage smartphones for the business market. Since then, AirWatch has grown to support more than 4,000 customers and manage millions of smartphones and tablets in 47 countries.

6. Toma Clark Haines, *The Antiques Diva & Co European Tours, 12 jobs, www.antiquesdiva.com

No one – not your mother, your clients or the vendors you're working with – wants to tell you "No" when you ask for something; most people want to find a way to tell you "Yes". My "aha" moment was when I realized this and started asking for what I wanted in life.

7. Kent Lewis, Anvil Media, Inc., 14 jobs,
www.anvilmediainc.com

After getting fired twice in a 2-year period, I realized I was unemployable and therefore, had to become an entrepreneur. I started Anvil Media in 2000 and since then, Anvil has been recognized as one of the fastest growing companies in the country for the past five years.

8. Kenny Rosenblatt, Arkadium, Inc., 140 employees,
www.arkadiu.com

When my wife and I were dating, we had an ongoing bet about who was the best Ms. Pac-Man player. We searched online for a site that would let us challenge one another, but we couldn't find anything. This inspired us to start our own game development studio, one which now boasts the largest library of Flash-based games in the world, and serves some of the most distinguished brands, including CNN, Discovery, Hearst, Lifetime and Microsoft.

9. Adam Aronson, Arrowsight, Inc., 60 jobs,
www.arrowsight.com

My epiphany came when I realized the remote video auditing technology I was using to monitor daycare workers could revolutionize the meat processing industry. Our platform is now in more than 50 percent of the beef industry in the United States. We are expanding into pork and poultry, plus hospitals to monitor patient care.

10. Tiffany Krumins, AVA the Elephant Brand*, 30 jobs,
www.avatheelephant.com

After years of working with children who have special needs I couldn't stand the thought of one more breakdown at medicine time. My "aha" moment – Realizing the medicine dropper needed to be shaped like a friendly animal with a comforting voice. I created the first AVA the Elephant at home and knew I had something special when it worked like a charm the next day at work!

11. Molly Fienning, Babiators*, 4 employees, www.babiators.com

My "aha" moment came while waiting in a flight line for my husband to fly home from a deployment. The entire squadron's families were there too, with children squinting in the bright sun. If the pilots have cool military-issued aviator sunglasses, why can't the children have some too? My husband and our best friends loved the idea. Babiators was formed!

12. Matthew Griffin, Bakers Edge, 15 jobs,
<http://www.BakersEdge.com>

Baker's Edge launched with a product marketed as a better baking pan. Sales were slow. I had my "aha" moment at a hobby and gift show. People were excited that the pan could bake brownies with all edges. We quickly changed the name to "Edge Brownie Pan" and sales exploded.

13. Rohit Arora, Biz2Credit.com, 50 jobs,<http://www.biz2credit.com>

My “aha” moment came in 2007. I constantly met successful business owners who told me they were denied funding even at the height of the credit boom. I set up Biz2Credit as an online platform to help entrepreneurs navigate the small business lending process and secure capital.

14. Michael Chasen, Blackboard, 3,000 jobs,<http://www.blackboard.com>

Applying to business schools was tedious so I drafted a plan for electronic applications. No takers. I still saw huge potential for technology to transform teaching and learning – colleges had to be where the students were. A friend and I started Blackboard, which now improves the education experience for millions.

15. Wil Schroter, Blue Diesel, 13,000 jobs,<http://www.bluediesel.com>

In 2007, I was about 3 years into building website company Blue Diesel and well over \$100,000 in personal debt from self-funding my first startup. Aha. After merging with a small ad agency, we brought our 40-person team to pitch pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly. Lily gave us its entire franchise of products – more than \$250 million in capitalized billings per year. I’ve since started 8 web companies, including Fundable.com.

16. Sheridan Becker, Bon Voyage, 15 jobs,<http://www.bonvoyagemagazine.com>

I’m an American but I’ve been working in Europe for 10 years. Our “aha” moment was when I figured out I could successfully publish as well as distribute books and magazines throughout Europe – and the world. Everyone pushed us to use the Internet – and we did. We are not an Oprah or Martha, but we don’t have to be BIG winners to be successful.

17. Bob Bernstein, Bongo Productions, LLC, 140 jobs,www.bongojava.com

After moving to Nashville to pursue journalism, I found myself loving the city, but unhappy with my career. My big “aha” moment came when I realized that my drive to be an entrepreneur was stronger than my drive to be a writer.

18. Daniel Gleich, Broad Financial, 20 jobs,<http://www.broadfinancial.com>

My “aha” moment came when I tried to invest a family member’s retirement funds in a piece of real estate, but couldn’t find a platform that allowed me to easily do so. From this frustration was born the idea for a company that would enable America to invest its IRAs in alternative assets.

19. Tom Cates, The Brookside Group, 15 jobs,www.brookside.com

During my MBA program, a professor told me, “Never worry about how big a market is – worry about how big it has to be.” I realized then that I had to not only identify the market but also believe in myself and my ability to do something better than others.

20. Kelly Delaney, Cakes for Occasions, 15 jobs,
www.cakes4occasions.com

After giving birth, I was forced to watch my staff present a wedding cake on the *Today* show from my hospital bed. By giving up control, I realized I had to put faith in my staff and work *on* my business rather than *in* my business. The staff doubled over five years!

21. Gary Kneller, CareMinders Home Care, 1500 jobs,
<http://www.careminders.com>

My "aha" moment came in the mid 2000's when I was diagnosed with stage three Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Having witnessed firsthand the shortcomings in the home healthcare industry, I was especially motivated to find a way to deliver quality care that goes beyond what I ever received as a patient. We're now at 35 offices with 10 more projected by the end of the year.

22. Nicholas Holland, CentreSource Inc., 35 jobs,
www.centresource.com

My "aha" moment came through a client experience with a 70+-year-old businessman who had changed his viewpoint on success. That's when my company, CentreSource, became an interactive agency that did work with the end goal in mind: it was our job to satisfy our customers.

23. David Moore, City Rewards Network, 50 jobs,
www.cityrewardsnetwork.com

I got started in 2001 selling advertising on my coupon platform (now called City Rewards Network). About 6 months later, I was having breakfast in a restaurant that had purchased my program. I looked up at the line at the cash register and realized that over half the people in the very long line were holding one of my coupons. It felt surreal to realize I had created something that really worked and people wanted to buy. That one moment energized me enough to expand into 20 markets.

24. Michael Cohn, Cloud Sherpas, 300 jobs,
<http://www.cloudsherpas.com>

I worked as an IBM reseller in 2007. We were hosting a Lotus Notes version launch event. The look on the faces of the buyers in that room was telling: another expensive upgrade offering incremental value. Light bulb! Could we sell Google Apps to Enterprise? Today we're Google's leading Enterprise partner.

25. Mark Carpenter, Columbia Roofing and Sheet Metal, 70 jobs,
www.reroofnow.com

My "aha" moment happened when I realized my green roofing business was being driven from the plant side of the product and not the roofing side. I secured several patents and I took the product to market. It is now a successful business on its own.

26. C. Brian Fox, Confirmation.com, 35 jobs,
<http://www.confirmation.com>

My "aha" moment: While literally watching a fax machine for 30 minutes because my supervisors at the Big 6 accounting firm believed it would stop

financial fraud, I realized there was no way to verify that it was actually the bank faxing confirmation of my clients assets, or someone pretending to be the bank. Our secure clearing-house validates the bank's identity for the external auditors and is what allowed us to uncover the \$215M Peregrine Financial Group (PFG) fraud in July.

27. Casey Halloran, Costa Rican Vacations & Panama Luxury Vacations, 100 jobs, www.vacationscostarica.com, www.vacationtopanama.com

In 1999, I co-founded an online travel agency in San Jose, Costa Rica. I was fresh out of college and running a web design business. My roommate Tony, a fellow U.S. expat, had an idea to start an online newsletter about Costa Rica. We solicited free stays at hotels in exchange for write-ups. Readers began to email us requesting travel advice. Our "aha moment" came when we realized we could charge for this service.

28. Pawan Deshpande, Curata, 15 jobs, <http://www.curata.com>

When we were searching for a market for Curata, we allowed several beta customers to test our content curation software. My "aha" moment came when a customer offered to pay for the software after successfully using it for marketing his company, proving that our software did provide significant value.

29. Chris Golec, Demandbase, 100 jobs, www.demandbase.com

We formed Demandbase to address the incredible inefficiencies in online marketing for B2B marketers. The ultimate "aha" came when we developed a "zero-waste" advertising solution: only serve ads to companies that are in your target market and have a chance to buy. Customers are wowed when they see how personalized targeting can increase revenue.

30. Snehal Shinde, Dhingana, 50 jobs, www.dhingana.com

In 2007, my brother and I noticed the increasing popularity of music streaming services like Pandora. Our "aha" moment came when we realized there was nothing like it for Bollywood music. We founded Dhingana, which has become the largest Bollywood music streaming service.

31. Samantha DiGennaro, DiGennaro Communications, 35 jobs, www.digennaro-usa.com/

I spent 15 years as a corporate communications executive at global companies. While I loved my role, organizational politics starved my soul. I was one of few women sitting among the c-suite. I knew I could build a better alternative — a company with strong values, employee flexibility and a family environment — to pave the path for talented professionals who challenge the status quo and break rules!

32. Mike Kawula, Discount Cleaning Products & Office Supplies*, 5 jobs, <http://www.discountcleaningproducts.com>

My "aha" moment came when I realized recently much of my day as an owner of a 3 year old fast growing company was spent working "in" the business as Michael Gerber would say verse "on" my business, which held us back from even faster growth. Recently I've entrusted employees more and outsourced my mundane work to allow me to strategically plan, monitor and tweak for

continued growth. I believe this will move us from \$3 million to \$5.5-\$6 Million in 2013!

33. Louis Foreman, Edison Nation, 60 jobs,
www.edisonnation.com

We were hosting casting calls for our inventor reality series *Everyday Edisons* and traveling with our team across the country. There were lots of great ideas, but we only feature ten inventors a season, causing us to turn away many with potential. My "aha" – develop EdisonNation.com where anyone can submit ideas 24/7 for a chance at development and licensing. Better deal for the inventors and our team.

34. Bob Din, En Pointe Technologies, 1,700 jobs,
www.enpointe.com

In 1985, a fast food business I invested in was seeing no return. I decided to computerize the accounts after realizing things were a bit messy on the management side of things. I bought an IBM PC, but quickly realized I needed a hard disk, a tape back, etc. Being prudent, I called several places and obtained different advice and varying price ranges for the same product! That's when I realized there was a huge opportunity here: if I can provide correct information, a reasonable price, and exceptional service, I will be successful. That year, I bought a ComputerLand business and grew it to \$700 million annual revenue by 1999. Today, as En Pointe, it has more than 500 associates in the United States. Today, as En Pointe Technologies, it has more than 500 associates in the United States and another 1200 globally.

35. Sara Sutton Fell, FlexJobs, 27 direct employees have helped 300,000+ workers find flexible jobs, www.flexjobs.com

My "aha" moment came from my search for a flexible telecommuting job. I quickly become frustrated at all the scams in the work-from-home niche and I knew plenty of job seekers felt the same. Aha! I solved my own job search problem by creating FlexJobs, where job seekers can find scam-free telecommuting and flexible job listings. Five years later, I work from home and managing a team of 27 telecommuters!

36. Simon Khalaf, Flurry*, 100 jobs, www.flurry.com

I saw the iPhone App Store in July 2008 and thought, "This is the next trillion dollar opportunity." After that, we placed Flurry on the path to be the platform for app measurement and advertising. Today, we employ more than 100 people, have a sizeable revenue stream and are cash-flow positive.

37. Michael Menart, The GenSight Group, 60 jobs,
www.gensight.com

At the peak of my career as the vice president of engineering for Johnson & Johnson, I was responsible for allocating \$2 million in capital spending. I had no clue if the decisions I was making were correct. Aha. I resigned and spent 3 months developing a methodology for corporate decision making. I started The GenSight Group and those methodologies have been implemented by corporations such as Coca-Cola, Cisco and Pfizer.

38. Krishna Gopinathan, Global Analytics, 400 jobs,
<http://www.global-analytics.com>

I had always wanted to “give back,” but I wasn’t sure how to do that in my field of analytics. My epiphany came when I found a way to build a software platform with advanced analytics that serves people with low access to credit, increasing their options and empowering them to save money.

39. Luke Richey, Gravity Jack*, 40 jobs, www.gravityjack.com

My 7-year old son asked for \$5 to buy a jacket for a vampire on a website. I asked him what was the benefit of an online 2D avatar? He didn’t know. I knew augmented reality provided benefits. I wanted part of the virtual goods market. I still use a small purple puppy to represent the vampire avatar during investor meetings.

40. Brian H. Sharples, HomeAway, Inc., 1100 jobs, www.homeaway.com

Prior to 2005, it was difficult to find vacation rentals online. I experienced that personally while traveling with my family (aha!), and as a result, co-founded HomeAway, Inc. HomeAway now offers travelers 735,000 properties throughout 168 countries while enabling our customers to generate an average of \$26,000 in rental income per year.

41. Debra Cohen, Homeowner Referral Network, 300 jobs, www.hrn.biz

Most homeowners know how hard it is to find a good contractor. I decided to do something about it. When a squirrel took residence in my attic and I couldn’t find a competent exterminator, it inspired me to create a business that would save other homeowners the same heartache. I believe that you should provide a service that helps people, keep it simple and maintain a personal touch.

42. Jay Schwartz, IdeaWork Studios, 15 jobs, www.ideawork.com

My “aha” moment came when my ex business partner decided to leave the business... it was a challenging economy and the agency was saddled with debt. He wanted to close the business and walk away, but I insisted on continuing on my own. I re-focused to key-in on the facets of this business that I could control. I streamlined our services and concentrated on what I did best.

43. Joel Pilger, Impossible TV, 42 jobs, www.impossible.tv

My ‘aha’ moment? Realizing this year that we had to see ourselves as a 10-year old start-up and reinvent ourselves within the changing media landscape. Letting go of our employee model – a sacred cow – to embrace a freelance model was painful. But it not only gave us a crucial competitive edge, but was also a path back to doing what we love most.

44. Brandon Wade, InfoStream Group, 30 jobs, www.infostreamgroup.com

As a shy MIT nerd who was never kissed until 21, my “aha” moment came when my mother told me to focus on my studies, because ‘one day when you’re successful and generous, the girls will come.’ That’s what prompted me to create my dating websites where women now outnumber men 10 to 1: SeekingArrangement.com, WhatsYourPrice.com, and MissTravel.com.

45. Bob Shirilla, Keepsakes.com, Simply Bags.com, 10 jobs,
www.keepsakes-etc.com, www.simply-bags.com

My wife closed her retail store in 1999. We created a small eCommerce site to sell the remaining product. Three remaining Pokemon blankets sold immediately and we kept reordering and sold hundreds. I rented a warehouse, created a large website and quit my job.

46. Dave Magrogan, Kildare's Irish Pub, 350 jobs,
www.kildairesirishpub.com

Our first "aha" moment started with Kildare's Authentic Irish Pub. There was a 5-year period where being Irish, celebrating Irish culture and Irish rock bands became very popular. Irish culture became my passion, so I opened the first location in 2003. It led to seven more units in four states with 350 employees.

47. Dave Kerpen, Likeable Media, 60 jobs, www.likeable.com

My biggest "aha" moment was when we made our first million dollars in revenue. I suddenly felt like we had a "real business", not just a "mom and pop." Five years, 60 jobs and several million dollars later, I still feel like we're in the 1st inning, but we are certainly a real business today.

48. Robert LoCascio, LivePerson, 700 jobs, www.liveperson.com

When I went on the Internet for the first time in 1995, I was shopping on a website and needed some assistance. Surprisingly, there was no one there. With millions of people online, I couldn't find a single person to connect with for help. I realized there was a major gap in the way we connected with brands and it was then that I began to dream up LivePerson.

49. Jake Sigal, Livio Connect*, 15 jobs,
<http://www.livioconnect.com>

Starting out, I combined my two passions – music and engineering – to develop and sell consumer electronics for Internet radio companies like Pandora, NPR and Grooveshark. My "aha" moment happened while debuting a product at the 2011 Consumer Electronics show that remotely controlled Smartphone apps for use in the car. People liked the product but developers were hot for technology, Livio Connect, inside it. Since launching Livio Connect, we've signed dozens of partners and just announced that Livio is connecting the TuneIn radio application into the 2013 Chevy Spark stereo.

50. Ron Cruse, Logenix International, 25 jobs, www.logenix.com

After founding and selling two companies in the 1990's, I was finalizing plans for my third company when 9/11 occurred. My profound aha was realizing the world had just changed immeasurably; the innovative services my company could provide would be essential for post-9/11 international business.

51. John Kujawa, Lumitec, 28 jobs, www.lumiteclighting.com

Marine products manufacturers typically have glacially slow product development cycles. As LED's (basically specialized semiconductors) came on the scene, their rapid evolution essentially precluded efficient market adoption in that market. Marine companies, unlike technology companies, simply couldn't get products to market before they became obsolete. Aha! We

built a company that thinks it is a high-tech Silicon Valley startup, but which focuses on marine lighting. Be nimble, innovative, responsive and daring and you will crush the competition.

52. Mackey McNeill, Mackey Advisors, 150 jobs,
www.mackeyadvisors.com

I founded Mackey Advisors, Wealth Advocates, 30 years ago at age 27. My "aha" moment is when I discovered that to succeed I had to master the one thing I had most tried to avoid in my career: sales. When I realized selling was simply meeting a need, everything shifted and business soared.

53. Paige Arnof-Fenn, Mavens & Moguls, 45 jobs,
www.MavensAndMoguls.com

I did not take more than a long weekend off for 4 years, afraid my hard work would disappear. My husband rented a Tuscan farmhouse with no cell phone or Internet access for one month and I was scared to take that much time off. I was thrilled to discover after one month away my company not only survived, it thrived. My business is still going strong today, many vacations later!

54. Kevin Ross, Metova, Inc., 7 jobs, www.metova.com

My "aha" moment came when I realized that while you can look to your peers for business advice and guidance, ultimately there is no recipe to follow. When I took accountability and ownership of my situation, I determined that I knew how to find the solution.

55. Paul Shrater, Minimus.biz, 30 jobs, www.minimus.biz

Leaving a cottage from a family vacation, we wished there was a place to purchase our favorite individual condiment packets instead of wasting the big bottles. Aha. I realized we could be the first to offer these and all of the travel-sized products that one might need for travel.

56. Jeff Tinsley, MyLife.com, 100 jobs, www.mylife.com

I had my "aha" moment 12 years ago: 'search engines are great at finding websites, but can I use the web to find people?' This led to the creation of MyLife.com, a website that enables 60+ million members to find people, make new connections, and manage those connections in one place.

57. Talia Bahr Goldfarb, Myself Belts, 3 jobs,
www.myselfbelts.com

My "aha" moment was noticing my potty training son's sagging pants. I discovered that there weren't belts that were easy to use and made specifically for young children. Myself Belts changed that with our patented one-handed belt closure. You never know where motherhood will take you! Myself Belts has helped keep kids' pants up around the globe.

58. Louis Silberman, National Laser Institute, 120 jobs,
www.nlionline.com

When I opened my first medical spa, the industry was like the Wild West. There were no standards in place for laser hair removal and skin treatments. Education was limited to a five-hour demo from the laser manufacturer. I wanted to make sure that customers would be safe, so I created the country's

first structured laser school.

59. Georgette Blau, On Location Tours, 48 jobs,
www.screenontours.com

When I realized that my first apartment in New York City was a stone's throw from where popular TV family *The Jeffersons* "lived," I had an "aha" moment and began scouting NYC locations used in filming other TV shows and movies. Today, 13 years later, I run six different bus tours in NYC and two in Boston. I went with my gut in 2001 to create our most successful tour, the Sex and the City Hotspots. In 2004, HBO featured us, bringing even greater success.

60. Rodney Anderson, Pancheros Mexican Grill, 800 jobs,
www.pancheros.com

I had my "aha" moment in the late 80's when I was a college student in the Chicago area. I noticed an abundance of taquerias, and would often frequent them to get tacos late at night. One day I thought to myself, "Why has no one else created a concept similar to this?" I took this idea and launched Pancheros Mexican Grill, placing the first locations near college campuses. To date, we have over 50 locations with plans of having a total of 65 units by 2013.

61. Josh Green, Panjiva, 50 jobs, www.panjiva.com

I was at a small electronics company, struggling to find a reliable supplier in China. I thought there was no reason it should be so hard. So, with MIT computer scientist James Psota, I set out to build [Panjiva](http://www.panjiva.com), a platform that could effectively connect serious buyers and sellers worldwide.

62. Jeremy Shepherd, PearlParadise.com, Inc., 50 jobs,
www.pearlparadise.com

In 1996, I was a flight attendant traveling in China. I purchased a pearl necklace at a market for \$20, had them appraised in the US and found they were worth \$600 – aha, business opportunity! Today, PearlParadise.com is the world's largest online pearl company, creating more than 50 jobs in four countries.

63. Hartley Peavey, Peavey Electronics, 14,000 jobs,
www.peavey.com

I built the amplifiers and P.A. systems for bands during high school and college, but I wasn't a great guitar player. After graduation, I had to be honest with myself. I thought, 'If I'm not going to be a rock star, I'll build the best gear for musicians at a fair and reasonable price.' Today we make the most sophisticated sound systems in the world.

64. Chris and Natasha Ashton, [Petplan Pet Insurance](http://www.petplan.com), 75 jobs,
www.gopetplan.com

Our "aha" moment came from a \$5,000 veterinary bill that opened our eyes to the fact that less than 1 percent of America's 170 million pets were insured. We seized the opportunity to build a billion-dollar pet insurance company that protects people's budgets and pets' health. Petplan has grown 2,200 percent over the last three years.

65. Paul Bailo, Phone Interview Pro, 15 jobs,
www.phoneinterviewpro.com

Phone Interview Pro came to me in a dream: the book.....the evaluation system....the online education ...the seminars. My 'Aha moment?' Meeting 15 top executives and having the CEO say: '200 years of HR experience in this room and we have been doing it wrong!' I knew I was on to something.

66. Andre Durand, Ping Identity, 250 jobs, www.pingidentity.com

During a 3-month sabbatical on a friend's sail boat in the Caribbean, I began blogging about new business venture ideas when I had the "aha" moment: none were possible without a more universal notion of identity on the Internet. At that moment I decided to come home early and start Ping Identity.

67. Austin Stoffers, Pure Fix Cycles*, 22 jobs,
www.purefixcycles.com

Our "aha" moment took place during our senior year of college in 2010. Looking to get around campus, we naturally turned to cycling. The last thing we could imagine doing, however, was spending more than \$1000 on a bike. Sadly, there weren't many other options. If you wanted a good looking fixed gear bike you either had to spend a lot of money or build it yourself. We chose the latter. With a focus on simple, good-looking, affordable fixes, Pure Fix Cycles was born.

68. Anthony Lolli, Rapid Reality Franchise LLC, 700 jobs,
www.RapidNYC.com

I personally trained seven of our top agents to manage our first wave of new branches. Right before construction began, however, they all left to start their own competing companies! That's when I decided to franchise, so I could offer top talent the opportunity to own their offices, instead of just managing. The result? 56 new franchises and 700 new jobs in three years.

69. Mary Brittian-White, Retriever Communications, 75 jobs, www.retrievercommunications.com

My "aha" moment came in 1997, when I purchased mobile IP and customers from Apple after Steve Jobs decided to get out of mobility. I knew mobile would be huge globally in the future and took the opportunity to found Retriever, giving me the foundation to launch my now extremely successfully company.

70. Eric Casaburi, Retro Fitness, 950 jobs, www.retrofitness.net

Around 4:30 a.m. on the day I was reporting to the LAPD police academy, I saw only one streetlight shining above a payphone miles away. I pulled over to that payphone and called my father, who said: "I'll see you at the airport." Later that afternoon I was on a plane back to New Jersey, and instead of being a police officer, I eventually established RetroFitness.

71. Jeff Hyman, Retrofit Weight Loss, 150 jobs,
www.retrofitme.com

My wife and I visited an Arizona wellness resort. Having a personal team of experts inspired me to create a program using technology to deliver the same

kind of personalized weight loss program via the Internet. I raised \$700,000 to start Retrofit, an expert-led, data-driven program with unrivaled results.

72. Cory Blake, Round Table Companies, 18 jobs,
www.roundtablecompanies.com

In 2006, I realized that artists and businesses often don't know how to communicate with one another to generate a creative product both were proud of. I created Round Table Companies as that conduit. We use artists of all kinds to promote brands and amplify their hearts and souls.

73. Mike Rustici, Rustici Software, 20 jobs, www.scorm.com

It struck me that my wife had a good job and good benefits. I didn't have kids yet. It was never going to get any easier to start a company than that single moment. That was my "aha" moment.

74. Tony Horwath, Sales Focus, Inc. 195 jobs,
www.SalesFocusInc.com

I had been building sales teams for companies for 15 years and had a process for success. I realized that most companies struggled in developing a sales process and mine would be effective in all industries. We've created more than 150 sales positions this year and grown 40-80 percent per year for the past four years.

75. Mitch Goldstone, ScanMyPhotos.com, 20 jobs,
www.scanmyphotos.com

My "aha" moment began as an "oops" crisis. As film transitioned into digital, business tanked, and I had to reinvent my retail photo imaging business that I'd started in 1990 into a nationwide ecommerce digitization service. The "aha" came by pioneering a super economical and efficient way to scan pictures. We noticed that people were only sharing recent digital photos on sites like Facebook and Instagram, but not those generations of photo snapshots.

76. Don Sabatini, SecretEntourage.com, 17 jobs,
www.secretentourage.com

I found the name for my new business entirely by luck, as I colored in the letters of the logo. Only later did I realize that Entourage spelled out ENT(er)-OUR-AGE. This was an "Aha" moment that led to a great directional shift in our business model.

77. Tyler Babb & James Endicott, Shipzi*, 8 jobs, www.shipzi.com
(2011)

Our "aha" moment came when we began hearing from business owner after business owner that shipping was a primary pain point. The software in our industry was expensive and difficult to use, so we sought to build something that would change the way eCommerce and small businesses ship.

78. Jason Richelson, ShopKeep POS*, 35 jobs,
www.shopkeep.com (2008)

Servers for two of my stores crashed, essentially closing the doors and almost ruining my vacation. When frantically checking my email, I realized that point-of-sale (POS) technology was outdated and the future was in

cloud-based solutions that did not exist. I came home, and started ShopKeep POS. We now have 35 employees, are growing, and have helped close to 3,000 merchants make smarter business decisions.

79. Tracy Oliver, Skycastle Media, 6 jobs,
www.skycastlemedia.com

I've run a marketing consultancy since 2005 and made a decent living, but it was still trading my time for money. My "aha" moment came when I decided to start thinking like the CEOs who hired me—someone who clearly understands the power of leveraging the talents of other people.

80. Rick and Jeff Platt, Sky Zone Indoor Trampoline Park, 1300 jobs,
www.skyzonesports.com

We had our "Aha Moment" in 2004 when we tried launching a trampoline-based sport. The sport didn't take off as planned; however, we noticed more and more kids asking to jump at the trampoline facility. We then realized we had a viable business model right at our fingertips. Furthermore, we grabbed a cash box and stack of wristbands and began to charge people to jump. Since then, Sky Zone has been more than successful with 23 locations across the United States and Canada.

81. Chuck Gordon, SpareFoot*, 50 jobs, www.sparefoot.com
(2008)

Initially, I had the idea of a person-to-person site where people store items for others. My "aha" moment occurred when I realized we have been comparison shopping for hotels online for years, but there was no way to do the same for self-storage. The concept of SpareFoot was born.

82. Kim Overton, SPIbelt, 12 jobs, www.SPIbelt.com

The idea for SPIbelt was born on Sept. 17, 2006 when I was jogging with my key tucked into my bra top. "There's got to be a better way," I thought, so I went home and assembled the first sleek, no-bounce small personal items belt in red.

83. Jessica Herrin, Stella & Dot, 20,000 jobs, www.stelladot.com

After my first company, women sought advice on starting their own businesses. I didn't have a good answer for how to launch without raising capital and committing to others' timeline. Then I ran into a group of enthusiastic, but "old school" direct sellers. I decided then to modernize flexible entrepreneurship with high style, high tech and high touch.

84. Dan Roitman, Stroll, 160, www.stroll.com

The "aha" moment me to go forward with my business was realizing that many companies produce great products but do a poor job of selling them. I was able to bootstrap Stroll's growth and build the #2 language learning brand in the U.S. by understanding that the internet provides the perfect laboratory for combining marketing with analytics and optimization to determine exactly how to position products for maximum sales.

85. Nathaniel Ru, Jonathan Neman, Nic Jammet; Sweetgreen, 300 jobs, www.sweetgreen.com

In 2007 while seniors at Georgetown University, we were unable to find quick-service, healthy food near the school and didn't want to be tempted by greasy burgers, tacos and pizza. As a result, we opened the first Sweetgreen organic salad bar. Sweetgreen now has 13 locations in DC-Metro and counting.

86. Tom Walter, Tasty Catering, 60 jobs, www.tastycatering.com

My "aha" moment? When my mid-level leaders came to me and said, "If you don't change the culture, we're leaving." This caused great stress for many reasons, including that these were long-time employees who were a large part of our exit strategy. This was a critical milestone in my entrepreneurial career. From that day forward, Tasty Catering's culture was transformed from command and control management to team leadership with the book *Good to Great* serving as a basis.

87. Mike Anderson, Tealium*, 70 jobs, www.tealium.com (2008)

At a past company, we were helping customers migrate from one web analytics solution to another, and they were quoted 12 man-months to transfer the same data over to the new solution. That gave us our "aha" moment that started [Tealium](http://Tealium.com), now the leading enterprise tag management system. We created a "universal" tag that would allow our customers to deal with one tag instead of hundreds.

88. Tom Szaky, TerraCycle, Inc., 105 jobs, www.terracycle.com

My "aha" moment was seeing so much waste in the dorms and cafeterias during college. The food and packaging discarded struck me as an environmental scourge, but also wasted opportunity. I realized making products from garbage would create a business with two revenue streams – collecting waste and selling recycled products!

89. Charles D'Angelo, Think and Grow Thin, 9 jobs, www.charlesdangelo.com

My "I'm obese" "aha" moment at 16 turned my life into a career business plan. I wrote *Think and Grow Thin*, appear on national & local media outlets, blog for HuffPost; coach senators, executives, parents and teens. My fitness empire in St. Louis has shed thousands of pounds for 100's of people giving them the ability to work again.

90. Ben Lerer, Thrillist Media Group, 200 jobs, www.thrillist.com, www.jackthreads.com

We had modeled our business after DailyCandy and for years had been referred to as "DailyCandy for men." Then one day, CNN wrote an article referencing DailyCandy as "Thrillist-for-girls." After the celebrating died down, we realized that we didn't have footsteps to follow anymore. It was in that "aha" moment that we knew we needed to evolve beyond the DailyCandy email content model, which ultimately resulted in us acquiring men's members-only shopping club Jackthreads.com.

91. Ken Oaks, Total Quality Logistics, 2,000 jobs, www.tql.com

I tried to make TQL something it wasn't – a trucking company. The day after buying my fleet, I found them covered in graffiti. It was downhill from there. I sold the fleet for a fraction of what I paid for it. My "aha" moment – stay

laser-focused on your core competency. For us, that's offering superior customer service and technology to connect customers who need freight moved with trucks that can move it.

92. Steve Ziegler, TriWorth, 40 jobs, www.TriWorth.com

The "aha" moment came when we shifted our core belief from "what" and "how" to "why." To provide the best talent externally to clients, we focused on creating an exceptional internal team environment and culture with the mission: "We build world class teams starting with our own."

93. Brad Hunstable, Ustream TV, 160, www.ustream.tv

The idea for Ustream stemmed from my need for an easy way for friends and families to share incredible moments with big audiences of deployed soldiers overseas. My "aha" moment came as I received requests from my friends in Iraq eager to watch my brother's rock concerts via live-broadcast streaming. It occurred to me that personal broadcasting was bound to redefine how people use and consume live media. Since then, Ustream has become leading network for live-broadcast online TV.

94. Michael Kirban, Ira Liran, Vita Coco, 475 jobs, www.vitacoco.com

After falling in love with a Brazilian woman who introduced him to coconut water, relatively unknown in the U.S. in 2004, my friend Ira and I realized that coconut water could be the next big beverage category. We were right. Today, Vita Coco leads a nearly \$500 million beverage category that's seeing triple-digit growth.

95. David Ciccarelli, Voices.com, 25 jobs, www.voices.com

If two people recorded voice-overs locally with modest success, surely there's a global market for voice-overs. Aha! So we built a website to bring voice actors together for work opportunities in exchange for an annual membership fee.

96. Ian Ippolito, vWorker, 15 jobs, www.vworks.com

In 2001 I'd created a site for programmers and many users were trying to hire me. But I was too busy to accept, and after turning down the 20th person, I realized there was a need for a marketplace where people could hire a remote worker safely. I prototyped vWorker.com that month and today it's grown to 15 employees and \$11.1 million in revenue.

97. Rob Schutz, What's the Deal (Now Chirp Guide), 4 jobs, <http://www.ChirpGuide.com>

In 2010, the daily deal industry was riding high and my company, What's the Deal, was soaring. A (smart) friend helped me realize that it was more important to take action based on the industry's trajectory, rather than my company's, especially to grow and potentially get acquired. That "aha" moment got us acquired in 2012 and led me to launch Chirp Guide, a resource for discovering live-tweeting.

98. [Larry Kim](http://www.wordstream.com), WordStream, Inc., 63 jobs, www.wordstream.com

I was a search engine marketing consultant doing endless work. I created a

software application to do the work for me and thought other companies could use my software. (aha!) Today, [WordStream](#) is the provider of the 20 Minute PPC Work-Week and [AdWords Grader](#), employing 63 people and helping +1000 customers grow their businesses.”

99. Ben Rubenstein and John Berkowitz, Yodle, 800 jobs, www.yodle.com

We were in college in 2005 when we started our local online marketing company, Yodle. Our goal was to reach \$20,000 in monthly sales before the next semester, or we would discontinue the business. We realized we had a viable idea after customers signed up and began spending over \$1000/month. Today, Yodle generates \$130+ million a year.

100. Mikkel Svane, Zendesk, 250 jobs, www.zendesk.com

When we started Zendesk in 2007, publishers of customer service software seemed quite content with the lack of innovation in the industry. Their customers and their customers' customers were not. Our “aha” moment assumption was that providing easy access to a powerful, cost-effective, and beautiful tool could quickly change the industry. With 20,000 customers and more than 100 million users later, we think we were right.

*Company is less than 5 years old.

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