

Bootstrapping Tips for Entrepreneurs: What Works and Why

Marty Schultz, Co-founder of [ObjectiveEd](#)

What's the best way to mark [World Entrepreneurs' Day](#)? Ensuring that entrepreneurs have the tools they need to grow their companies! We often hear that raising capital is vital to get a startup off the ground—but another strategy, bootstrapping, actually works better. Increasingly, entrepreneurs are realizing they'll be better off bootstrapping their ventures while they spend their time pitching potential partners and customers instead of VCs. As a long-time [serial entrepreneur](#), I've utilized bootstrapping extensively.

Here are some tips...

First, aim to solve a specific problem. What's your goal? What problem are you trying to solve? To which potential customers have you spoken? Only through extensive cross-dialogue can someone determine the true scope of a problem and whether it's worth devoting resources to solve it. Next, don't fall in love with your product. As I tell budding entrepreneurs, it's vital to consistently seek information from the marketplace. The original product or idea is bound to change over the period reaching from initial conception to launch. The first idea is never the final product. Those entrepreneurs who get hung up on their original vision are only revealing themselves to be inflexible in an endeavor where flexibility is key.

Third, find out where the "pain" is. If it can be demonstrated that the product or service under development has the ability to alleviate someone's unmet need, money will follow. The best way to do this is to spend as much time as possible speaking with those who could potentially benefit—rather than VCs. Also

critical: lose the ego. Don't mistake your own needs and wants for those shouldered by the community that the startup is intending to serve. Entrepreneurs have to be able to frame what they are doing in a selfless manner and pivot when necessary.

On top of this, aim for social good. Certain entrepreneurs, including many millennials, want to enhance social good through their product and services. This is another reason many may opt not to start by appealing to VCs, whose foremost goal is rewarding investors. Any entrepreneur for whom social good is a priority may find bootstrapping to be an attractive alternative. Getting creative with marketing is vital as well. At a conference where I spoke to teachers of visually impaired children about my company [ObjectiveEd](#), I distributed stickers with numbers on them to audience members, and those who found matching numbers won a \$50 iTunes gift card. With this amusing exercise, I performed a memorable branding activity that helped promote my company.

Finally, don't be afraid to pick up the phone. It can take a tremendous amount of calling to reach prospective partners or key members of your prospective customer population. But this is vital because in many cases, speaking to them one-on-one is the only way they will open up and explain to you exactly what they are looking for in a product or service.

On World Entrepreneurs' Day—and every day—bootstrapping could make the difference between a potential success and potential failure.



About the Author: Marty Schultz is Co-founder of [ObjectiveEd](#), whose mission is to maximize educational outcomes for children with disabilities. He was Founder of Blindfold Games, now a division of Objective Ed, that has built accessible games for the visually impaired community since 2012.