



CAREERS



CHRISTINNE MUSCHI/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Eytan Bensoussan: 'I will die on the treadmill rather than get off and quit'

NorthOne co-founder, CEO discusses his humbling experience in law school and why putting on blinders helps him achieve goals

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Eytan Bensoussan, 36, is co-founder and chief executive of NorthOne, a tech-powered banking service for startups, freelancers and small businesses. NorthOne's mission is to empower entrepreneurs and save them time and money through its platform, which automates and simplifies their banking and financial management.

At McGill, I was very active in many extracurricular groups. It helped me quickly figure out that I wanted to be part of a group of people committed to a vision and a cause – sometimes leading them, sometimes being led, but always being a part of something mission-first. And, as my career was navigating itself, it became clear to me that this drive would express itself best in the business world.

Law school was a real lesson in self-awareness. I went from being among the top of my class in the faculty of science, to the bottom of my first-year law class. I sat in the dean's office two or three times in my first year, saying that I wanted to quit. Then one day, I realized

that I hate quitting far more than I hate suffering. So, I buckled down and decided to go the distance to finish among the top of my class once again.

You always want to be Michael Jordan on the basketball court, not Michael Jordan on the baseball field. In law, I saw people that were loving every aspect of their learning and professional experience, and I wanted to feel like them. But law was not the place for me to become that person. It didn't feel "right." I suppose it always comes down to my self-awareness. If I realize I'm on the wrong court, it's time to ask myself some hard questions.

Starting in consulting, it couldn't have been more engaging and thrilling. Five years in, I started realizing that my basketball court might again be elsewhere.

One of the things I learned is that putting on blinders to achieve a goal can be an effective way to get to the finish line. It's my personal bulldozer approach. However, you have to then ask yourself: Do I actually want what I just achieved? I will die on the treadmill rather than get off and quit. I will just go and go, and sometimes I need a friendly tap on the shoulder to remind me to back off for a second and just recalibrate.

When I left McKinsey & Co., I wanted to invest myself in something that had a real societal impact. But I knew from other experiences that I didn't want to be doing that through an NGO – I wanted to use the forces of capitalism to improve the lives of people around me.

NorthOne is the result of investing myself for societal impact. Small business is one of the most effective ways for many people to get out the door and change their situation in life. But small businesses are also terribly difficult to succeed in. If we make that life a little easier, saving these businesses time and money, we will do a lot of good for a lot of people. That's where NorthOne comes in. We believe that reducing income inequality, increasing economic mobility are the outcomes of an empowered small business sector.

I break the spectrum on extroversion. Speaking to people gives me energy. Likewise, surrounding myself with an amazing team at NorthOne is a way to leverage that. I'm constantly interacting with people that inspire me.

Mentors don't need to be older than you, and they don't need to be more senior in the hierarchy. Some of the people who were junior to me at McKinsey have been my mentors over time.

I've looked at my career as a succession of iterative career moves. Each time, you get a little more knowledge as to what you're good at, what you love, what you don't. And over the course of my studies, each summer internship and each job helped me get a little closer to co-founding NorthOne, where I feel alive and fulfilled on the daily.

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This interview has been edited and condensed.

How to handle a new, overly critical boss

ROB WALKER

Question

Not long ago, I took a new job, leaving my old company after 18 years because it was restructuring and I felt I needed a change.

My new boss has a really bothersome habit: He can be extremely condescending to me about something minor that is not entirely my fault – and then apologetic afterward. For example, the other day I didn't bring all necessary papers to a meeting because he didn't give me sufficient notice. He chastised me to never do that again, and ordered me to go and fetch all the missing papers. But later that day, he came by my office to apologize.

This is the third time that this has happened! I have not been treated this way since the summer jobs of my youth. I don't know if I should say something to him the next time it happens, arrange a separate conversation with him

or just go to human resources.

I don't think he is going to change and I've learned that my position has had high turnover. I just want to try to make it better before I look for a new job.

Answer

Starting somewhere new after working at one company for 18 years inevitably entails some adjustments and bumpiness. So before you make a rash decision to bail on this new gig, make at least some effort to figure out whether you and your new boss can adjust to each other.

Certainly, if you say nothing, then nothing will change. Maybe start by diplomatically addressing the issue the next time he shows up to apologize. Express appreciation – but make it clear that these incidents leave you confused. And since he has just apologized, risk putting him on the spot: Ask for reassurance that he's happy with your work.

If the issue persists, you can go to human resources, but do so in the spirit of seeking input, not just levelling a grievance. If this manager has trouble hanging on to employees, HR will understand the problem without your having to make an actual complaint.

But don't convince yourself the situation is hopeless without even attempting a remedy. Perhaps with time, you can learn this manager's patterns as he learns yours; he'll become less likely to snap at you, and you'll be less likely to take it seriously when he does.

Or perhaps not, and you'll need to leave. But after so many years at one place, allow yourself enough time to acclimate to this one. If you jump into an even more bothersome situation, you may discover that the person who overreacts and then regrets it is actually you.

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Nine easy ways to take charge of your professional development

MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

Good leaders should offer their employees support and direction, setting clear goals and targets, giving regular feedback, and offering concrete tools and suggestions for future growth and development. But, unfortunately, that doesn't always happen. Usually citing lack of time and other resources, the one piece that tends to slip most often is advice and emphasis on continued learning and professional development.

But if you have aspirations to progress and flourish in your career, you're not going to get there unless you invest in broadening and deepening your expertise and experience. Which means that you shouldn't sit back and wait for training and leadership growth opportunities to fortuitously appear. It's up to you to take control of your own continuing professional development. It's about you – your needs, your desires, your goals and your gaps. So, what can you do to take charge?

First, keep in mind that professional development is not so much training as it is a state of mind. A philosophy of continuous learning is not restricted to sitting in a classroom. In today's connected world, there are so many ways to access knowledge that the real skill is not accessing information, but rather filtering what you've obtained from a variety of sources and applying it.

■ **Start by establishing the gaps:** Compile a list of competencies needed for the position you're in as well as those you want. Competencies are the skills, abilities and knowledge needed to be successful in a particular role. Whether it's technical knowledge or interpersonal skills, a targeted approach can also lead to more informed conversations with your immediate supervisor.

■ **Read more:** Not just about your area of expertise, but also about current events and subjects that are outside your day-to-day responsibilities. When you read widely, you bring alternate perspectives to commonplace issues.

■ **Ask to job-shadow:** It's an easy and low-risk way to learn. If your organization doesn't have a formal program, just reach out to someone you'd like to shadow and see if they're willing. If not for an entire day, perhaps they'd agree to let you buy them lunch while you ask questions.

■ **Attend formal courses:** This old standby still works. But don't just look at in-person training – evaluate online learning as well. Look at options, consider the costs and benefits, and discuss it with your manager. Ask if your organization has professional development dollars to support your attendance.

■ **Get mentors:** Seek out those who have accomplished what you aspire to. Thoughtfully build relationships with those who will offer you honest feedback and different perspectives, both within and outside your organization. If you find yourself facing changing times or challenging situations, a mentor can bolster your confidence and resilience.

■ **Cultivate peer networks:** Connect with others in your industry and take the time to build rapport beyond just the exchange of business cards. Your industry peers are like-minded people who probably have great insight into your working situation.

■ **Get social:** There is an amazing amount of useful content shared on LinkedIn, Twitter and other social-media platforms on a daily basis. The challenge lies in sorting the valuable from the worthless. But don't let that deter you. With a little effort, you can find and follow the groups, thought leaders and hashtags that are related to your field. But don't just be a reader, kick it up a notch. Post and share content illustrating your expertise.

■ **Teach others:** When you impart your knowledge and skills to others, paradoxically, you often find that you'll learn even more yourself. In fact, sometimes, you'll discover more from your "students" than they do from you.

■ **Access resources:** Many professions require you to maintain a membership, and your association likely offers industry events, conferences, workshops, on-demand learning, e-newsletters, journals, webinars and more. So take full advantage of these learning opportunities.

Your professional development is something that you need to own and champion for yourself. Your immediate manager and organization can certainly support you by providing feedback, advice, tools and resources, but you are the only one behind the wheel of your future. So jump in the driver's seat and start steering for yourself.

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