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# What I Learned from an Entrepreneurship Class That Changed My Business

Jacob Hoekstra (Baylor University)

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> Your first idea doesn't matter. What's important is being able to reevaluate when circumstances change and to see your skills as building blocks rather than remnants of a past venture.

Starting a business during my undergraduate years at the University of St. Thomas wasn't something I planned; it was something I stumbled into. During the COVID lockdown era, I spent hours working out at home and improvising exercises with the little equipment I had. Somewhere in that mix of boredom and quarantine creativity, my first real venture was born.

It began as a simple fitness website offering personalized workout routines tailored to whichever equipment people had at home. I built the site from scratch, partnered with a friend who was a personal trainer, and even sold branded apparel through a dropshipping setup I pieced together with YouTube tutorials. The idea was perfectly timed, and for a while it worked surprisingly well.

But once gyms reopened and routines normalized, demand for my business disappeared almost overnight. What had once been useful no longer mattered. By my senior year, the site was a dormant URL with no more users. In my mind, my early run at entrepreneurship had quietly come to an end.

Then I took a class that forced me to see everything differently.

## Seeing the Real Problem, Not the One I Wanted to See

One of our first assignments in my entrepreneurship 101 course was to break down a business model and examine its assumptions. I chose my old fitness site out of convenience, expecting the exercise to confirm what I already believed. Instead, mapping the idea onto basic frameworks revealed a reality I had ignored: The venture no longer solved a meaningful problem. It had been built for a fleeting moment, and I never adapted when that moment passed.

Specifically, we were asked to deconstruct the venture by identifying its core assumptions: Who exactly was the target customer? What problem was the product solving? What conditions allowed the business to work? When I applied those questions to my fitness site, one assumption immediately failed—continued demand depended almost entirely on lockdown conditions. Once gyms opened, the problem I was solving no longer existed. That realization shifted my thinking from "How do I revive this idea?" to "What problem do I actually know how to solve now?"

Realizing this wasn't discouraging; it was clarifying. I learned that entrepreneurship isn't about clinging to an idea just because it once worked. It's about staying honest with yourself when the world changes faster than you do.

This experience changed my fundamental view of entrepreneurship. I had always assumed entrepreneurial thinking was something you were born with—something you either had or didn't. The course challenged that assumption. By learning how to systematically evaluate opportunities, test assumptions, and reflect on outcomes, I realized that entrepreneurship is not just intuitive; it is teachable. That realization is one reason I am now pursuing a PhD in entrepreneurship.

## Understanding My Skills Before Understanding My Venture

Another project required us to map our personal skills to potential opportunities. It seemed simple, but it was the

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first time I stepped back and looked at myself separate from the venture I had built.

I realized that I had developed real, transferable capabilities: building websites, managing logistics, coordinating dropshipping workflows, designing apparel, and engaging with niche communities. Seeing those skills on paper reframed everything. My early venture wasn't a failure: It was a training ground. The structure I built still had value, and I hadn't recognized the versatility of the tools I'd created.

In class, we discussed the idea of an "entrepreneurial thumbprint"—the unique combination of skills, experiences, interests, and networks that shape opportunity fit. Mapping my own thumbprint forced me to focus on opportunities that aligned with my capabilities, who I was, and what I thought I could realistically execute. That self-knowledge made pivoting easier by narrowing the path of viable options to focus on.

## Learning That a Pivot Doesn't Mean Starting Over

As I reflected on where my interests and skills intersected, one area kept resurfacing: combat sports. I'd followed the scene closely for years and understood its culture and community. When I took a closer look, I noticed a clear gap: Many of these athletes had loyal audiences but struggled with merchandise, branding, and online infrastructure.

Suddenly, the systems I'd built for my previous venture made sense again. I didn't need to start over from scratch. I could redirect what I already had toward a more promising opportunity.

So, I repurposed the entire backend of the fitness site into a merchandise and branding platform for athletes. I pitched merchandise concepts to athletes' agents, offering to handle logistics, design coordination, and fulfillment while their clients brought the brand and the audience. Within months, I was launching product lines for professional athletes and was even featured on ESPN.

The more profound lesson was realizing that pivots work best when they build on foundations you've already laid.

Looking back, the pivot followed a simple but repeatable logic: (1) identify transferable assets from the original venture, (2) assess whether those assets solve a persistent problem in a different market, and (3) test the new direction with low-cost outreach before fully committing. Framing the pivot this way transformed it from a leap of faith into a disciplined reconfiguration of existing resources.

## Recognizing That Markets Shift—and So Should You

Before the entrepreneurship class, I misinterpreted early traction as permanent validation. I assumed initial demand meant long-term viability. But the market moved on, and I didn't move with it.

The course forced me to confront a truth I had avoided: Customers evolve, behaviors change, and timing matters more than founders like to admit. I learned to think less about what I wanted my venture to be and more about what people actually needed in the moment. It's easy to confuse passion with relevance. The class taught me to listen to the market even when it tells you something uncomfortable.

## Realizing That Entrepreneurship Is About Identity, Not Just Ideas

The more I progressed through the course, the more I noticed a shift—not just in how I thought about my business, but also in how I thought about myself. I stopped tying my identity to a single venture and started seeing myself as someone with adaptable skills, judgment, and experience.

That shift mattered more than any assignment. My confidence no longer depended on whether my first idea survived. Instead, it came from knowing I had the ability to reconfigure what I learned for opportunities I hadn't yet imagined.

## In Short

- Pivoting works best when it is analytical, not reactive. Using simple frameworks to test assumptions helps founders decide what to pivot—and what to keep.
- Entrepreneurial skills are learnable. Structured tools and training can profoundly change individuals' judgment in recognizing, evaluating, and pursuing opportunities.
- Your entrepreneurial "thumbprint" matters.

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Understanding your skills, experiences, and interests clarifies which opportunities are worth pursuing.
- Ventures you move on from are rarely complete failures; they are data. Skills compound even when markets and trends change.

## Final Thoughts

If there's one thing I hope others take from my experience as a young business owner, it's this: Entrepreneurship isn't defined by the first idea you run with. It's shaped by your willingness to reevaluate when circumstances change and by your ability to see your skills as building blocks rather than remnants of a past venture.

My early project wasn't a dead end; it was a foundation, a rough draft that required revision. That class didn't just help me pivot; it also helped me see opportunity in places I hadn't looked before.

Ideas expire. Skills don't. Sometimes, the most important pivot isn't changing your business model; it's changing how you understand yourself as a founder.

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