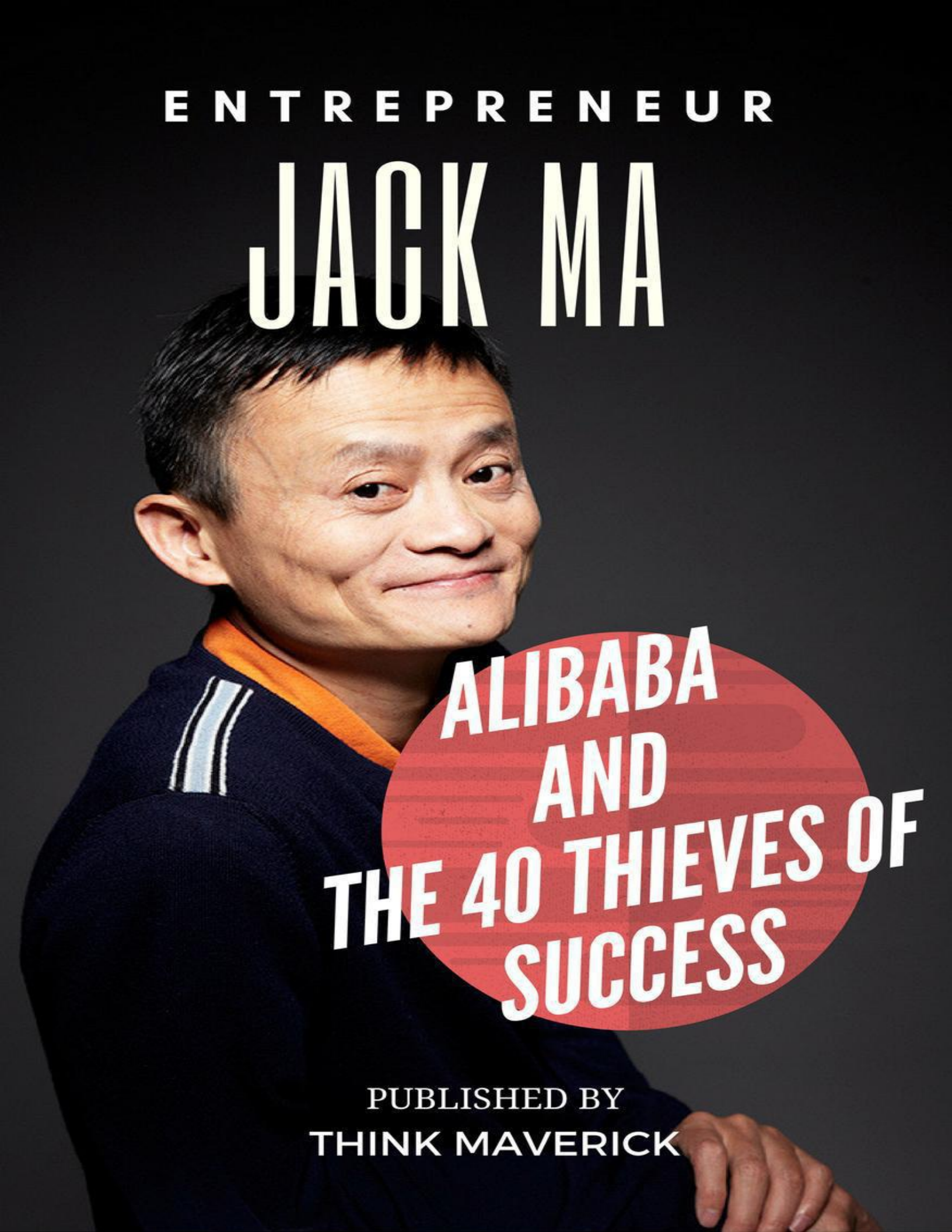
ENTREPRENEUR

JACK MA



ALIBABA AND THE 40 THIEVES OF SUCCESS

PUBLISHED BY
THINK MAVERICK

Entrepreneur: Jack Ma, Alibaba and the 40 Thieves of Success

If you've been following Jack Ma for a long time, you probably already know some of these...
Don't be mad; just give yourself a pat on the back!
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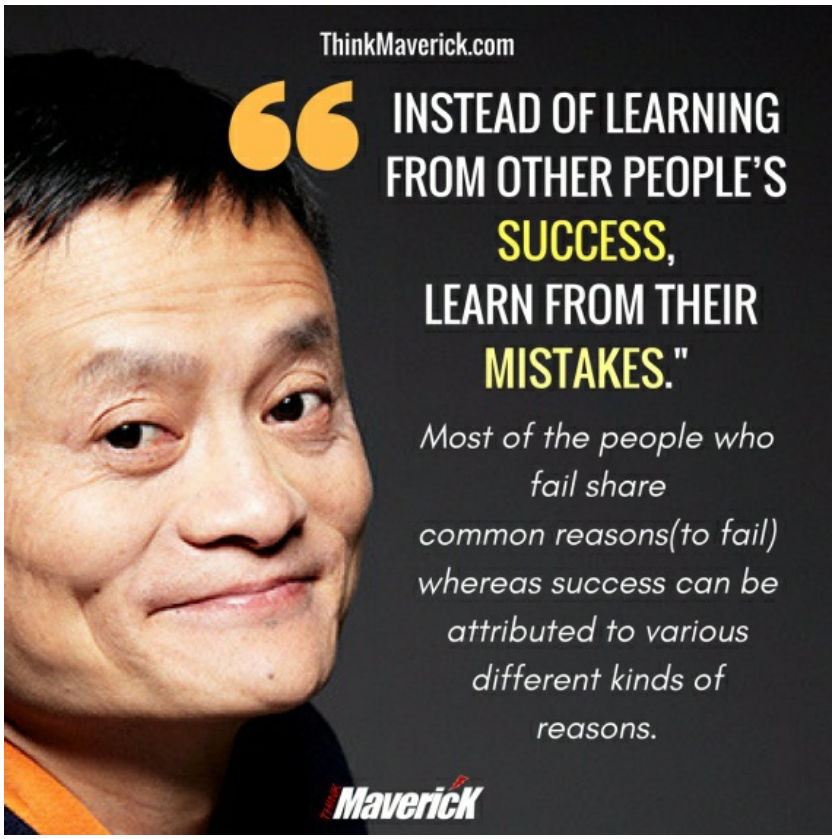
Wrapping It up

Lesson #1



"Instead of learning from other people's success, learn from their mistakes. Most of the people who fail share common reasons(to fail) whereas success can be attributed to various different kinds of reasons."

– Jack Ma

There are a lot of powerful quotes that you can learn from Jack just by doing a search on Google, but this book is much more than a compilation of quotes.

Take, for example, a one-liner like, "My job is to help more people have jobs." from Jack Ma. It's pretty self-explanatory and you might be able to guess at the deep underlying meaning.

But I'd still bet that **you would forget it within a week.**

However, what if **I made it infinitely more powerful** by including his own explanation of why he uses this maxim to empower his organization? Including how he uses them to great effect.

The context and his own words teach you how to THINK like the 1%, not just regurgitate quotes.

That is the mastery we're aiming for.

Since there are also plenty of biographies about Jack, this book is not going to tell you his whole history. But I am going to tell you about his story lesson by lesson and how he arrived at this stage in his life.

We are all social creatures who love great rags-to-riches stories. Our brain loves these stories because it "transports" us into the eye of the beholder.

In fact, studies have found that such inspirational stories have a profound effect on our brains and help us to become more empathetic and compassionate. What's more, our brains tend to resonate with our own experiences in order to seek a real life connection.

I don't generally view myself as an author or an interviewer. I view myself as an entrepreneur in need of personal advice from a great mentor. So on a daily basis, when I come across someone or something that triggers my thought processes, then it would be worth my time digging a little more in depth about it (This book is the result of what I found).

I am a very inquisitive person and I don't conform to conventional wisdom. If I can't relate to something or replicate the results onto my own ordinary life, I will move onto the next story.

Every lessons and notes in these pages has personally helped me in my solo-entrepreneurial journey. I've applied dozens of these philosophies & hacks into growing my own business. The lessons here have aided in my journey towards building a 6-figure publishing company without any notable mentors by my side and helped me faced my toughest adversity (Acid Test).

They will help you when you need them most.

Now, most of us are psychologically intrigued by stories of unbelievable success, but we fail to discover and pay attention on what sets these strangers apart. We fail to recognize the journey it takes to arrive at the peak. There are literally a thousand and one ways to achieve success, but only **a dozen or so reasons for complete and utter failure**.

So what makes Jack Ma so different from the rest of the world's 1%?

He started without any money, without any technology and without any plan.

And yet the real factors that underpin Alibaba's success today are its competitive edge in e-commerce, logistics and finance. What Jack describes as the *"Iron Triangle"*

Always judge a man by his questions rather than his answers. It's easy to take his words today at face value but it is often difficult when you try to uncover how he originally arrived at that answer.

Being the founder of China's largest and best-known ecommerce enterprise, with an estimated net worth of over $35 billion, Jack is now the richest man in China, out of a population of 1.38 billion people.

That is no mean feat. Jack has simply followed a simple set of rules he crafted to allow himself to bend reality to such an extent that the universe starts to favor his plans.

Jack has defied all traditional wisdom of starting a business in conservative China at a very difficult time but he ultimately won the respect and admiration of presidents, prime ministers, politicians, and fellow-entrepreneurs around the world with his openness, humility, dedication to constant improvement, and charming sense of humor.

His tact and diplomacy in his dealings with people from all walks of life have allowed him to forge partnerships with businesses, governments, and organizations both in China and beyond, making him one of the world's truly influential people.

From simple beginnings as a school teacher in Hangzhou, China, Jack has solely followed his dreams and built a business empire worth billions from the ground up with his own two hands.

Did you know that Jack was once paid with **just $12 a freaking MONTH** as an English teacher in Hangzhou, China?

Here's where it gets more interesting...

Lesson #2

"If you don't give up, you still have a chance. Giving up is the Greatest Failure."

Jack Ma

For Jack, giving up is his mortal enemy. More impressive than his remarkable wealth is his uncanny sense of persistence. He loves to emphasize this phrase, "Today is hard. Tomorrow will be worse. But the day after that will be beautiful. Most of your talent won't make it past tomorrow."

Embracing challenges is part of starting a business. As an entrepreneur, the winners are the ones that stay with problems longer. I learnt this first hand for myself when I started on my solo-entrepreneurial journey.

Jack's philosophy of perseverance and optimism about the future originated from his very own soul-crushing rejections and disappointments.

Jack wasn't a straight A student. In fact, he was very close to failing to get into middle school. He didn't give up even after failing his key primary school test twice, his middle school test thrice, and his college entrance exam

another two times.

Well, most of us would have dropped out of school for those same exact reasons. Unsurprisingly, Jack isn't the only one in a long tradition of great minds who struggled incessantly at academics. Winston Churchill, Einstein, and Abraham Lincoln shared the same struggles too.

When Jack decided to launch Alibaba and the Alipay service, respected businesspeople and close associates told him **he had ZERO chance of success**.

Instead of feeling distressed by all the negativity, he channeled his inner positivity and stuck at the plan he had in mind. Eventually, it broke through and today *Alipay has over 400 million registered users who transacts over 175 million times in a single day.*

Talk about the numbers exceeding the entire US population!

His positive spirit forms the basis for everything Jack does, and is one of the reasons for Alibaba's excellent work environment and high employee satisfaction ratings.

Lesson #3

"A leader should have higher grit and tenacity, and be able to endure what the employees can't." ***– Jack Ma***

These are the 3 simple words that Jack has been told throughout his early life.

"You're no Good!"

Even after graduating from college, he was **turned down by over 30 different jobs**. This even included his application to become a police officer.

He stayed optimistic despite being rejected by all of them. And that gave rise to his resolve to build his own enterprise. For Jack, watching his favorite movie, Forest Gump gave him the gumption he needed to pursue his own cause.

Lesson #4

You don't need to become a Top Student

To quote Ma: *"I am not good at math, have never studied management, and still cannot read accounting reports."*

Jack Ma, once told his son: "You don't have to be the top student in your class, being mediocre is just as fine, just as long as your grades aren't too bad. Use your free time to learn other stuff,"

It is one thing to be bad at math, but it is another thing altogether considering the fact that **he only scored 1 out of 120 points in his math exam**.

The Chinese media back in 2014 used to describe the 49-year old Jack a fraudster, an insane and paranoid person.

But as it turns out, he never needed to heed anyone's approval or even to be good at math in order to build an e-commerce company dwarfing the likes of Amazon and eBay combined.

Unlike the captains of industry back in Silicon Valley, the likes of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and other prominent tech tycoons, Jack doesn't have any

background in computer sciences and IT. More preposterous is the fact that he never even heard of the word “computer” until he was a teenager. He only discovered the existence of the *internet* in 1994 when he traveled to the States as a business interpreter.

Lesson #5

He tells Charlie Rose in 2015 on the effects of being rejected. *"I think we have to get used to being rejected. We're not that good."*

When KFC first arrived in Hangzhou, Jack and 23 other people went for the interview. 23 of them were hired. Jack was left out because of his personal looks.

What's funny is that **Jack even knew he'd be rejected by applying to go to Harvard**, but he applied for it anyway for a whopping 10 times. (*Talk about taking no for an answer*)

"It wasn't about the rejection" he laughs, he just wanted to see those rejections in words telling him he is no good, so that he can channel all his energy and focus on the next project.

Although he jokes about it now, Jack does feel the pain like most of us when we're being rejected. It is bitter, but I guess the patient needed the bitter pill to swallow in order to get him prepared for the long road ahead.

Hearing a lot of "NO" is part of what entrepreneurs have to take in all the time. Jack heard the same thing at the very beginning of his journey. There

are a million good ideas everywhere, but only you can help grow your own idea and make it a reality.

So it is only up to you to continue to stay upbeat. You are the one spending the most time with your thoughts, so make sure you're saying the right things!

"If you can't get used to being rejected – just like a boxer who cannot take the hits or punches, how can you ever win?" he tells a group of young empowered African Entrepreneurs in Nairobi.

You got to take the hits, and keep moving forward. That's how winners are made!

During his visit to the USA in order to raise $5 million from venture capitalists, he was also rejected. But despite the major setback, he vowed to come back the next time to raise more money.

Perhaps today, the VC's would regret their blatant disregard for Jack's little startup, because today his company is worth 360 billion dollars and is Asia's No. 1 company.

Lesson #6

Rejected, but not a Failure

Instead of reinforcing success, Jack prefers to pass around his strange and relentless pursuit in spite of countless failures.

"When you read too many success stories, you let it go to your head." He says during his talk at the University of Nairobi. "They think that 'I can be successful' just because they read or heard the same thing".

Every optimistic entrepreneur needs a dose of reality now and then. The fact is that when you share a lot of stories how people have failed, then it would be something that you would learn not to do. It would be one less reason for you to fail.

Learn from other people's mistakes

While encouraging entrepreneurs to dream big and embrace failure and rejection as a learning experience, Jack is equally careful about not making senseless mistakes that could have been avoided. Always a keen observer of other countries, cultures and businesses, he is always on the lookout for examples of unexpected and avoidable failure, and he often uses these as case

studies of how not to run a business.

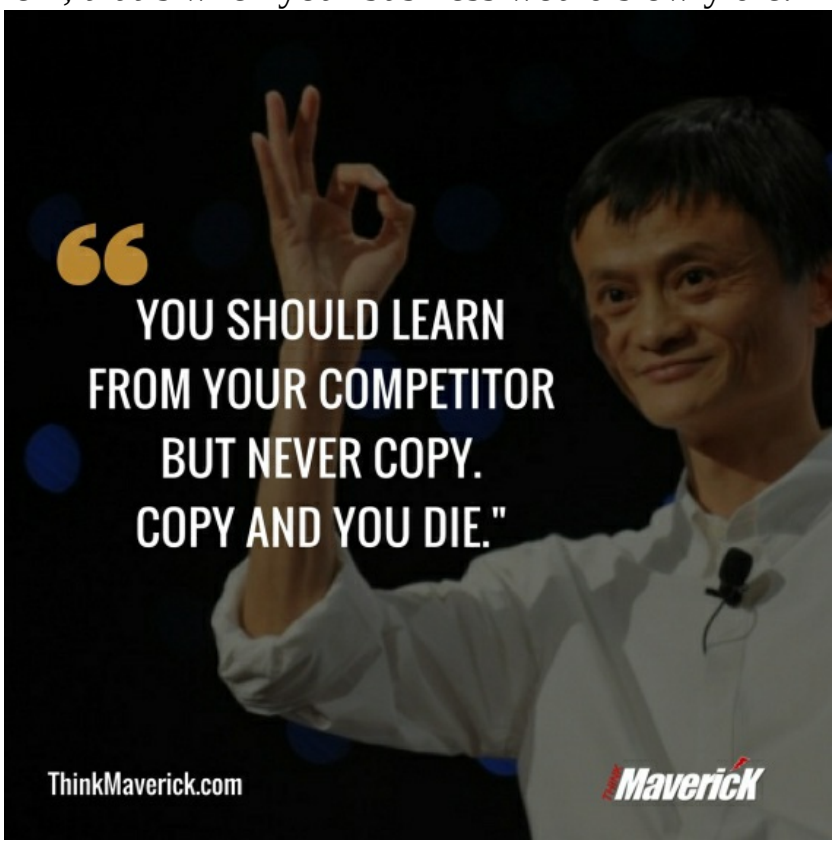
By studying these failures, how they came about, and why they were allowed to happen in the first place, Jack tries to shape his way of thinking to avoid unnecessary failure and it helps to develop his team the same way as well.

Learning from the mistakes of others is not the same as gloating or taking pleasure in their failure. If you take an objective look at well-known companies and how they failed, you'll probably also learn how they bounced back from failure. Understanding the ups and downs that are part of the journey in any business will allow you to anticipate problems even before they arise.

Jack isn't the only one who uses this methodology of inversion. Charlie Munger, a billionaire investor and Warren Buffett's long standing business partner also prefers to look at what could go wrong instead by making a list of all the possible ways that they could fail. (Read Step #5)

Lesson #7

There’s nothing wrong with learning from someone who succeeded before or modelling after the competition, but when you begin to take it a step too far by copying them, that’s when your business would slowly die.



Jack was quoted, *“You should learn from your competitor, but never copy. Copy and you die."*

Whether you’re starting your own business or you’ve been growing your business for a long time, copying may just be the easiest temptation you and I can have.

It’s like a little devil standing on your shoulders saying, “Go for it, they’re doing it, so should you!” It’s tempting to take the easy way out and copy every single thing your competitors are doing, but there are some big warning signs you should heed.

When you are trying to do something that your competitor has been doing for a long time, you are potentially reaching deep into your pockets in order to out maneuver them. While you may have a better idea, you might not have the systems in place to provide extra services.

You are spreading yourself too thin by putting the extra load onto your plate. While you could offer something extra for your customers just because you don’t want to lose their business, all those extras may come at a higher cost.

Although some copying is inevitable and most innovations today are just slight improvements over existing inventions, at the end of the day, you can’t copy the culture, passion and strength.

If you have a small business competing with a larger one, you should ultimately aim to corner a niche and FOCUS on your CORE competencies. As your business matures and revenue grows, eventually you then can decide to build the systems and teams in place around that additional service or product.

Lesson #8

"When you are small, you have to be very focused and rely on your brain, not your strength." ***– Jack Ma***

In its early days, Alibaba's customer representatives would pretend to be non-Chinese while they communicated with their American customers via email.

Jack has brushed up on his Art of War philosophy. While he acknowledges that eBay may be a shark in the open waters of the Global e-commerce enterprise, they are the crocodile of the Yangtze river who will always win in their home turf.

Alibaba was built with the right technology service in mind, at the right place and at the right time in China, with their burgeoning consumer population who are internet users reaching a mind-boggling estimate at 600 million.

Lesson #9

"I'm not a tech guy. I'm looking at the technology with the eyes of my customers, normal people's eyes." **– Jack Ma**

Perfecting your core product or strength is difficult enough on its own, but when you try adding new ideas onto your plate, you begin to get distracted and overload your capacity to perform great work.

Every new line of products or services you add into your offer now becomes like its own "mini-business, and then before you know it, your business is now rushing to play catch-up.

You have to begin training your people, finding new vendors, establishing the right prices, set-up operations, hire designers, execute new marketing strategies, etc. The list goes on and on.

Start-ups have to understand that they must work on their business, not *in* their business. There is a fine line between the two and one that can distract you from the heart of your business.

There is a ton of work if you decide to take the bigger competitors head on. That isn't a smart or right move, and that is why nine out of ten startups will fail. This is a hard and bleak truth, but one that you'd do well to ponder on.

SOONER OR LATER
You will regret it if you spend
all your time at work
ThinkMaverick.com
Maverick

Lesson #10

"Help young people. Help small guys. Because small guys will be big. Young people will have the seeds you bury in their minds, and when they grow up, they will change the world." **– Jack Ma**

Jack Ma talks about Alibaba's ecosystem that can help empower small businesses around the world. At the IPO of Alibaba, Jack made a statement by not ringing the opening bell at the NYSE, instead he chose to let some of his selected clients to ring it for him.

Seen by many as the crowning achievement of Alibaba's first day in the USA, the decision made by Jack was to fully emphasize his strong standing culture of his policy that the *"Customers are first, Employees are Second and the Shareholders are third."*

While this move may seem to look like a huge publicity stunt, Jack is merely focusing on his value proposition rather than taking Amazon head-on. Jack ma explains that Amazon is more like an empire who controls everything from the conception of the idea to the delivery of its products; while their philosophy is to empower the small businesses to be able to

compete with the likes of Microsoft or IBM.

Lesson #11

"My job is to help more people have jobs." ***– Jack Ma***

Jack spoke with CNBC and NYT columnist Andrew Sorkin at the World Economic Forum about people associating the Alibaba e-commerce platform as China's Amazon.

However, Jack's intention is to create a platform to serve 10 million small business sellers. Instead of hiring millions of people to deliver for them, their purpose is to create job opportunities through 3rd party sellers. That in turn has allowed millions of people to conduct their own businesses through it.

By solving the needs of the many, Alibaba has ultimately succeeded in being the pioneering company that people can rely on. They have ensured that they are reliable, efficient and innovative, so the billions of dollars they have made are ultimately due to the public's trust in them.

Lesson #12

"Today, making money is very simple. But making sustainable money while being responsible to the society and improving the world is very difficult." – **Jack Ma**

To truly succeed, you need to learn how to solve a big societal problem. Relying on trends and money making opportunities is easy but it won't be enough to make an impact to put your company on the map.

It's not about money, Jack ma says in a Stanford business school seminar. When you have $1 million dollars, you're a rich man. When you have 10 million dollars, you're in trouble; you worry about inflation and where to invest your money.

But when you have $1 billion, that's not your money, it is the society's trust, the shareholders; people believe that you can spend this money better & smarter than the government. Now that's a challenge.

Lesson #13

"When we have money, we start making mistakes." **– Jack Ma**

Our relationship with money changes as we begin to have more of it.

How does it change? For one, the mistakes tend to increase with it. Every new stage in our financial chapter requires new strategies we need to follow. And at every stage we give ourselves new reasons to not follow those strategies, costing us money and risking our financial security.

For instance, when we're first starting a business, we tend to be frugal and calculated in our approach. Then as the revenues starts pouring in, we begin to take big plunges like investing and advertising. Each new venture or tactical decision begins to involve a lot of capital and risk. More chances to mess up.

Lesson #14

"The very important thing you should have is patience." **– Jack Ma**

The new generation today lacks the patience to see things through. This has something to do with the way we're consuming information from social media.

Our attention spans are shorter than a goldfish. According to a Microsoft study, we have less than a 9 second focus and concentration. Our increasingly digitalized lifestyle has drastically affected us.

And if we don't do something about it, our life will not see any meaningful changes.

With patience you can avoid making hasty decisions that may cost you money. It is the only way to shape talent into real achievements in life. It is the only means necessary to master any subject, art or skill.

Lesson #15

"Never ever compete on prices, instead compete on services and innovation." **– Jack Ma**

The biggest shopping site under Alibaba is Taobao, where there are over seven million merchants selling their products.

E-commerce sites have been practicing the *discounting trend* in order to win over customers. While low-balling their competition may attract more customers, you've got to remember that it will eat into your profit margins making your business harder to sustain for the long term.

If you don't have deep pocket investors like Amazon or eBay trying to gain a huge market share over the competition, then you should never try to do so.

Discounting your services almost always doesn't work over the long-run. In 2000, Starbucks tried to penetrate the Australian coffee market. They expanded quickly, opening over 80 shops in prominent locations. After eight years, sixty of those shops closed down.

Why did they fail? Australia's small and independent coffee shops

improved the overall quality of their services and products instead of engaging in a price war.

While coffee may have a high-turnover but low profit margin, most businesses may not share the same characteristics for instance, businesses that focuses on services and intellectual resources. So, having said that, your business may still be able to compete and still maintain a healthy profit even though you lowered your prices.

Lesson #16

"You need the right people with you, not the best people." **– Jack Ma**
One of the most profound impacts that we can make in our lives is the people we choose to be around with.

"Show me your friends, and I'll tell you who you are." Is an age old proverb that is still relevant till this day!

Years ago I studied with friends who were actively disengaged from the lectures. We sat around waiting for breaks and hung around to talk about other stuff that didn't matter.

And because I made my decision to be around with people who didn't like studying and love having more fun than our own personal growth, I ended up becoming one of them.

However, when it comes to forging partnerships to start a company, the right qualities of entrepreneurship is one that you should always look for, and not just the most successful one. While you may be intrigued by the idea of recruiting someone great, they may not always be the best fit for you.

Successful partnerships are a dime a dozen. It is never easy to maintain a

professional business relationship through a roller-coaster ride. Statistics show that up to 70% of business partnerships ultimately fail.

Why? There tends to be an unequal level of commitment most of the time, with the lack of success contributing to the biggest portion of partnership failure.

Differing values between two hard headed personalities may also eventually lead to a distasteful end to an otherwise illustrious partnership. Take the likes of Steve Jobs and John Sculley that ultimately ended up with the removal of Jobs from his own company.

Nothing breaks down a business partnership faster than a lack of trust. Given the circumstances of shared liability and profits, integrity issues put the entire company at risk. And this is totally unacceptable.

Jack Ma Quote: *"The most unreliable thing in this world is human relationships."*

The only way to work around this is to look for someone just so that his skills and qualities can be complementary to your business organization. Hence, *find the right people to start with, not necessarily the best people!*

Lesson #17

"Intelligent people need a fool to lead them. When the team's all a bunch of scientists, it is best to have a peasant lead the way. His way of thinking is different. It's easier to win if you have people seeing things from different perspectives." **– Jack Ma**

Jack Ma was an English teacher in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province back in 1998. Despite being in the tech e-commerce sector, he has very little knowledge about technology back then.

His academic-like inquisitiveness has been the hallmark of his success. Jack has relished his position as a chief education officer.

He proved that being born to a traditional family doesn't impede your ability to become successful. Solely with just the desire and vision, Jack sowed the seeds of entrepreneurship back when China has just discovered the internet.

Lesson #18

Grace and tact

No matter what situation Jack finds himself in, his first instinct is to be gracious, diplomatic and tactful. Unlike many cutthroat CEOs who like to ruffle feathers in the media and in the boardroom, Jack believes that negotiation, politeness and finding mutually beneficial outcomes is more important than waging war on the competition.

"I don't want to be liked. I want to be respected." ***– Jack Ma***

While some CEOs are portrayed as power-hungry egomaniacs by the media, Jack comes across as part leader, part guru. Soon after he starts speaking, the audience forgets that he is a multi-billionaire and starts listening intently to the lessons in life, humor and spiritual development that he has to offer. This disarming, open quality has allowed Jack to reach out to all kinds of people and form beneficial partnerships over the years.

Lesson #19

What's next?
Focus on young people

Jack has a surprising confession. He plans to retire. He began planning for that special day when he touched 45. He doesn't want to be one of those old men influencing the direction of the company long after they're lost their mojo.

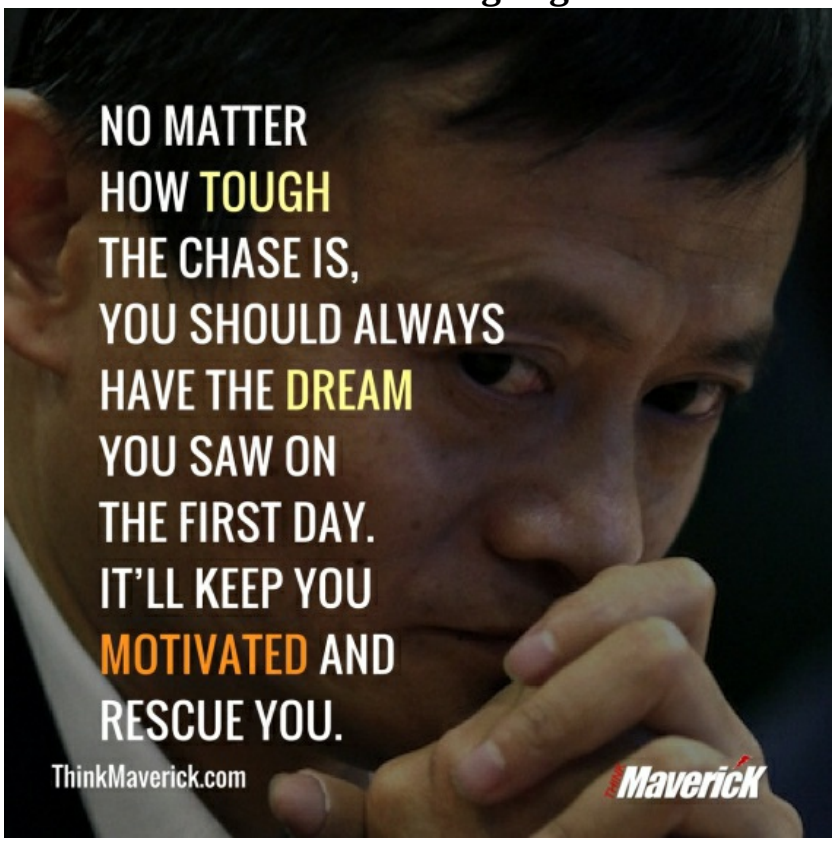
"*We should give the young people a chance," he says.*

Young people bring fresh ideas, new skills and a different mindset to any organization - and Jack encourages his young employees to share their vision with him. As a hugely successful tech entrepreneur, Jack is fully aware that new generations have a familiarity with new technology and are willing to use it for business purposes much more readily than their older colleagues. By mentoring and promoting fresh young talent, Jack is able to keep his business relevant and future-focused.

Jack's belief in young people is an extension of his belief in the future. While some business leaders tend to limit their world-view to the issues faced by their own generation, Jack is dedicated to making the world a better place for future generations. One of his greatest wishes is that ecommerce should become as commonplace as electricity, connecting the world and allowing the exchange of business ideas, products and services across the world.

Lesson #20

On Dreaming Big



If it weren't for big dreams, Jack would have still been teaching at a small local school in China. Instead of accepting his fate and settling into a daily routine that would have limited his potential, he allowed himself to dream - and dream big. Jack readily admits that people have called him crazy, with Time magazine going so far as to label him "Crazy Jack" for the size and scope of his dreams, but he remains totally committed to his big-thinking business approach. In his own words, "*we may be crazy, but we're not stupid.*"

Today, Jack is playing his tune on the world stage. Much like the premier, President Xi Jinping of China, Jack promotes the merits of global trade by pledging to create 1 million jobs in the US.

Can he really create 1 million jobs over the next 5 years?

So far the company only had over 46,818 full-time employees, majority

being in China. Amazon by comparison had about 230,000 employees, and Wal-Mart boast a massive 2.3 million employed around the world with 1.5 million just in the US alone.

A recent US poll indicated that over 80% of respondents had never heard about Alibaba. So promising President Trump that Alibaba would be able to create 1 million jobs in the next 5 years is a huge promise!

Don’t count him out just yet...

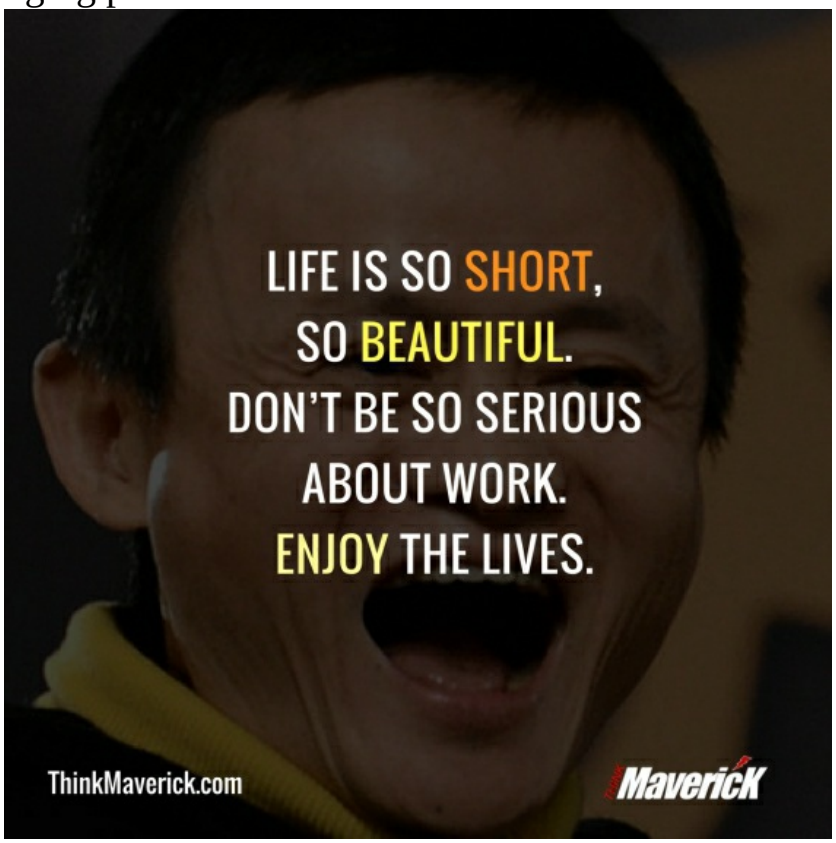
Today, Jack looks back on his big dreams and is humbled by the heights his organization has reached. Never one to be too satisfied with himself, he prefers to focus on new projects and goals that require even greater planning, commitment and hard work as he sets his sights on the next big dream.

Lesson #21

On Work & Rest

"Life is so short, so beautiful. Don't be so serious about work. Enjoy the lives." **– Jack Ma**

Working 24/7, 365 may be a habit for some top CEOs, but Jack prefers to work hard and rest hard. The slim, youthful 53-year-old is well known for taking time off to relax, travel, play golf and spend quality time with his family. He usually schedules plenty of time off before the launch of a new company or business venture, giving himself time to think, plan and prepare for the challenging period ahead of him.



Jack's belief in rest and relaxation is an inspiration to overworked entrepreneurs around the world who could all benefit from some down time now and then. As our bodies and minds relax, we are able to produce high-quality ideas and find solutions to problems that seemed too big or complex to overcome. In Jack's case, building one of the world's great ecommerce businesses may not have been possible if he hadn't taken the time to look after his body and mind as well.

Lesson #22

On Preparation

If there's one thing Jack has proven, it's that a simple website can be grown and nurtured into a multi-billion dollar trade hub. Part of the reason for Alibaba's huge success is the countless hours that Jack put into understanding the internet, the world trade and investment environment, and the ins and outs of corporate business. Without his careful planning and preparation, and the ethos of preparation that he has instilled in his team, Jack's business would not be the resounding success it is today.

For those of us who like to rush at the first opportunity we see and dive in without careful planning, Jack's approach to business is a great lesson in focus and precision. Sometimes it's better to wait until you're ready to make the most of an opportunity before you act, or as Jack is fond of saying, "*success can come at any time and any age*".

"*A new wave is coming and jobs will be taken away.*" Jack predicts that in the next 30 years, AI (Artificial Intelligence) will overtake human knowledge, leading to massive job losses.

‘For those of you who are able to prepare and catch up with the wave will benefit massively. But for those who fall behind will suffer immensely.”

Get ahead today by preparing yourself! A year from now you may wish you had started today. I was glad that exactly 5 years ago, I decided to start working for myself instead of looking for a good Engineering job.

Lesson #23

On Humility

"I'm a normal guy." ***– Jack Ma***

There is nothing arrogant or self-satisfied about Jack Ma, despite the huge success that his company has achieved since its launch in 1999. He is more likely to focus on areas where he can improve than bask in the glory of his success, and always places a strong emphasis on the success of his employees and the customers he serves. Developing others is a key element of Jack's successful strategy, and this sets him apart from many ego-driven CEOs.

Coming from simple beginnings, Jack has never forgotten the ups and downs that led him to success. His humility, good humor, and willingness to learn from others are qualities that every successful entrepreneur should emulate. This philosophy is responsible for Jack's amazing ability to empower and develop others, which in turn has made his business hugely successful.

Lesson #24

On Solving Problems

"Opportunity lies in the place where the complaints are." ***– Jack Ma***

When Jack launched his first ecommerce website back in the 1990s, there was literally no online information about Chinese products and manufacturers. Within hours of its launch, his first website had generated over 5 queries from excited customers, but the road to success was by no means smooth. Jack's unique way of thinking and problem-solving helped him overcome numerous challenges, including the major hurdle of creating his own payment service (AliPay) when local banks in China refused to accept Alibaba as a client. Today, his escrow service is one of the biggest online payment systems.

Entrepreneurs sometimes play it too safe when it comes to launching a new product or service, wondering whether the market will be willing to accept something totally new. As Jack's experience proves, there are times when the status quo just isn't working and those are the times when innovation can lead to massive success.

Lesson #25

On Ambition and Embracing Rejection

Before Jack founded Alibaba, he invited 24 friends to his home to discuss about his ideas. They remained confused despite explaining to them for the next two hours.

At the end, 23 of them told him that his idea wouldn't work because he has no experience, knowledge about the internet and any start-up capital to begin with.

There was only a banker who was his close friend at that time that told him to pursue the idea. Even his family and friends strongly opposed his plans.

"I pondered upon this for one night, and by the next morning, I decided I would do it anyway, even if all of the 24 people opposed the idea." ~ **Jack**

Looking back, he realized that he was purely driven not by confidence or opportunity, but more of the fear of regret from not trying it out.

Jack Ma later attributed the reasons for a person losing out in life is due to the fact that they are being myopic to opportunities being presented in life.

"No matter what one does, regardless of failure or success, the experience is a form of success in itself." ~***Jack***

When the idea is right and the emotion is strong, people with ambition would **take massive action** but unfortunately, most people do not.

The lack of ambition is the most likely reason people are poor.

Before the feeling passes and the idea dims, ***you should ACT on the idea***

because a week from now; a month from now or a year from now, your urgency will no longer be present.

That is why the **seriousness** of your ambition determines the potential of your future. **Everyone dreams, but not equally**. Some dream at night, others like Ma are dreamers of day who act upon it.

These are dangerous men. They live a life of great ideas and realized that their action speaks louder than words.

Part of being ambitious is also your tolerance towards rejection. Or perhaps it could be the sudden realization that you strongly dislike being disrespected or being humiliated.

No one likes to be trampled on, discriminated and humiliated. If you can channel that strong emotionally discord into a moment of self-realization or development then it would pay-off eventually.

Jack has had to deal with rejection from the very beginning, from being refused a job at the local KFC to his ten rejection letters from Harvard and numerous other business challenges and failures.

Instead of taking rejection and failure personally, Jack has decided to live by the philosophy that failure allows us to grow. Every time he fails, Jack takes a long, hard look at what went wrong and makes sure he doesn't repeat

it again. This hard approach towards his business has allowed him to fail fast and bounce back on even after everyone else has given up.

It’s easy to imagine that top CEOs like Jack Ma rode a straight-line to the top, but the reality of success in business is very different. Jack is an entrepreneur who plays open cards about his past failures, inspiring business people around the world to regroup after a disappointing result and try again - until they succeed.

Lesson #26

On starting early

Image Credit: The Apricity

One of his famous lines was broadcasted in May 2015 by South Korea's KBS where he spoke to eager young entrepreneurs who wanted to succeed.

Jack said: *"If you are still poor at the age of 35, it's your fault!"*

According to Jack, there is a tentative timeline that you should adhere to if you want to lead a meaningful life.

This is what he said:

Be a good student before you turn 20

It's the best time to learn as fast as you can and get the experiences you need to help prepare you for the next decade of your life.

Follow or work in a small company before you turn 30

In a small business, you learn to cultivate the passion you need to run your own business. You get to learn what it takes to run it like a well-oiled machine. You have to multitask. A good boss will teach you how to think & do things differently.

Between the ages of 30 to 40 years old

You need to decide for yourself which path you intend to take. You either work for yourself or continue working for an organization.

Between the ages of 40 to 50 years old

You must now focus on your strengths, things you work at the best. Jumping into a completely new territory might derail you from your objectives. You may be successful, but the rate of failure is too great at this age.

Between the ages of 50 to 60 years old

Rely on the young. They are the ones that you should invest in. Identify and support those who have the potential. You may be greatly rewarded because the young have more zest and adaptability for the future.

When you at over 60

Now may be the time for you to relax and enjoy the fruits of your labor. It may be too late to start a business or change for the better. But hey, by all means, prove Jack wrong.

Colonel Sanders, the founder of KFC didn't achieve anything remarkable until he decided to dig out his old family recipes and sell fried chicken. He didn't start a franchise **until he was 62, and only became an icon at the age of 75.** But do take note that Colonel Sanders is just one in a billion people who did what he was already good at.

Jack founded Alibaba from his small apartment in China, with just a handful

of friends to support him in his early venture. To set up the company, he borrowed a total of $60,000 from 18 of his friends.

Till this day, whenever he needs any inspiration, he still returns to the apartment where he first started his venture.

From these humble beginnings, he committed himself to improving and growing his business to serve the needs of growing consumers in China.

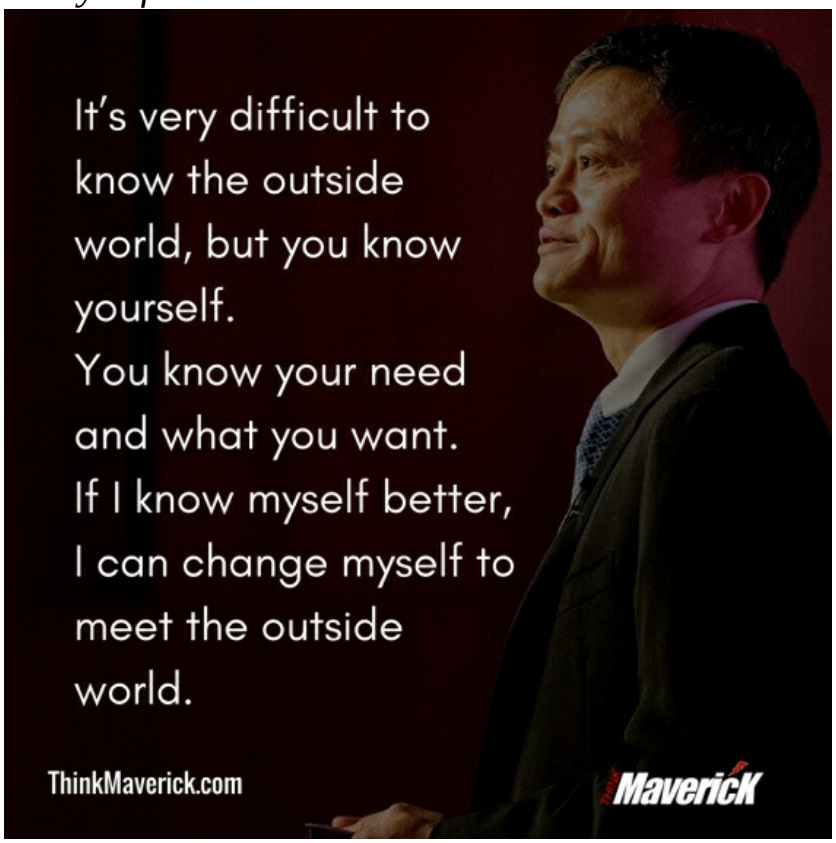
If there’s one thing that most entrepreneurs have heard from their critics, it’s that their ideas are irrelevant to the times and that they are too young & inexperience to start. While you should never ever be bullish and stubborn about your ideas, it is also critical to be open to constructive arguments.

If Jack had listened to a majority of his friends who considered his ideas preposterous, he would never have built a business to serve more than 500 million people today. Every business, no matter how large it is today, has its humble roots. For entrepreneurs, the secret is to start early, embrace opportunities and be flexibly stubborn.

Lesson #27

On improvisation

"It's very difficult to know the outside world, but you know yourself. You know your need and what you want. If I know myself better, I can change myself to meet the outside world." **– Jack Ma**



While it's important to have big dreams and a business plan to help you make them come true, there's no succeeding if you stick rigidly to your original plan when situations change.

Jack has always valued innovation and finding new solutions, having launched the first ecommerce website in a highly-regulated environment in China and achieved breakthroughs despite heavy competition from enormous companies like eBay. One of Jack's business secret weapons is to stay agile, focused and always look at a different angle in order to thrive.

"It doesn't matter if I failed. At least I passed the concept on to others. Even if I don't succeed, someone will succeed." **– Jack Ma**

There may be keys to success in business, but there is no blueprint or manual that will guarantee results. As an entrepreneur, learn from Jack's

flexible approach and make the necessary changes if you hit a wall. You'll solve problems before they emerge and maintain the edge you have over your competitors.

Lesson #28

On creating solutions for yourself

At a time when China was experiencing an economic downturn, Alibaba continues to discover new means of delivering more revenue.

How was that possible?

By embracing and investing in **social influencers.**

What they did was bring in some of the hottest and most influential bloggers in entertainment and social media from platforms like Weibo, Momo, and Youku Tudou.

They conducted live streaming and interactive engagement with their loyal fans attempting to keep the users longer at their site. Then on Taobao, these influencers turned their fans into red hot buyers.

This strategy is contributing to Alibaba's continued growth despite a downturn in the Chinese economy.

By blending social media with e-commerce, they increased their mobile

customers by approximately 25% to 493 million.

When the situation doesn't favor you, always find a unique approach to turn things to your own advantage. This usually involves a *broader strategy that defies conventional methods.*

They incorporated new solutions into their existing strategy which draws users to open the Taobao app 6 to 7 times a day, each time averaging around 30 minutes. Even users on Amazon's app don't even come close to doing this.

"Alibaba views themselves not only as a marketing place, but a place where people spend time," said an **HSBC analyst.**

Sometimes when doing things are just not effective enough. If you see the opportunity to revolutionize and reinvent the existing model, don't let the idea pass you by.

Many of the great products and services in history came to exist because entrepreneurs were frustrated with the way things were done and decided to create an alternative. Alibaba's success is living proof that this approach can bring great rewards.

Lesson #29

On taking responsibility

Jack ma regretted and admitted that he made a huge mistake by telling 18 of his initial partners (the ones that contributed the $60,000 dollars to start Alibaba) that the highest they would be promoted would be as manager. And that he would instead hire outsiders to fill-in key positions within the company.

He notes that this was his biggest mistake when all those of whom he had hired, moved on to other companies. Finally, the 18 of his partners still remained with Alibaba. They went on to become vice presidents and directors of the company.

Jack is famous for his view that leadership is all about taking responsibility. From overseeing the running of his companies, to empowering his employees and making a meaningful impact in the world, Jack displays responsible leadership in every aspect of his life and business.

As an entrepreneur, you have nowhere to hide. Taking responsibility for your key business decisions is more important than hiding behind an excuse.

Your character is more important than your know-how.

Lesson #30

On being extremely persistent

The Chinese have a famous parable about the bamboo tree. Understanding this simple story will not only motivate you; but inspire you in moments of self-doubt and frustration.

Like any tree or plant, the Chinese bamboo requires constant nurturing - water, a fertile soil and sunshine.

In its first year, you will see that there are no signs of activity. In the second, third and fourth still no signs of growth.

Is nurturing the growth of this plant even viable?

Our constant efforts have not been fruitful thus far. Should I continue to pour more effort into it?

Then **as you're three feet away from gold**, in its fifth year, the bamboo experienced a growth of over 80 feet in a matter of weeks!

Did the bamboo lie dormant for the past 4 years or was it developing the foundations to support its exponential growth?

The answer is obvious; it pays to be persistent towards your dreams &

goals. While you may have read of tremendous successes that seem to happen overnight, it often isn't the case.

Do not compare chapter one of your story to somebody who is already at chapter 30.

9 out of 10 lottery winners weren't able to sustain such incredible amounts of wealth for a long time. They end up either bankrupt or strained in their relationships.

Alibaba wasn't a massive success over a period of just a few years; it took them nearly a decade to have something to show for.

Today it has grown from a one-man business to a multinational organization employing more than 40,000 employees since its inception in 1999.

We have been indoctrinated by our society to believe in *quick-fixes*. You get frustrated if you get hold back by traffic for even a second. You get angry when you have to wait a few minutes for the traffic lights to change. You get deceived by instant solutions to your financial and relationship troubles.

Most businesses feed on that notion, by offering you instant gratification or the easy way out.

Maybe it is high-time that we reflect on the old maxim by Aristotle:

Jack still has bigger plans for his organization. His vision is to build a company that will last for at least 102 years - from 1999 until 2101.

In order for him to build a business that last for centuries, he has to work

on creating an ecosystem – so that Alibaba can stretch to a span of three centuries, and make a very big change in the world.

Over the coming century, Jack foresees more challenges for Alibaba, but his wish is that the company will persist, thrive and adapt in the ever-changing world economy.

"We should never finish a 20 year program in two years." ***– Jack Ma***

Henry Wadsworth once recited a poem over a 100 years ago that the "*heights of great men were not attained by sudden flight, but they were reached and kept through hard work while their companions were fast asleep."*

Being an entrepreneur is not easy, and there will be times when you feel like throwing in the towel - but those are the times you will grow the most if you keep at it.

Jack had many reasons to quit, in fact he calls **Alibaba his 1001 mistakes**, but his tenacity drove him to achieve something out of this world. The rest is up to you...

Lesson #31

Have a great sense of humor

"Life is so short & beautiful. Don't be (too) serious about work. Enjoy (your) life." **– Jack Ma**

Jack Ma singing the Lion King

Jack Ma is one of the most genuinely amusing CEOs out there, and his sense of humor is always filled with positivity. Unlike some who take the opportunity to grill their competition in public or criticize, Jack is more likely to tell a comical story about himself.

This light-hearted approach towards life has seen Jack through the good times and bad, and it distinguishes him from the rest of the pack who are sometimes more focused on trying to get ahead at every opportunity.

No matter how difficult things can become, Jack never lost his sense of humor. If you find yourself stressed over the challenges of running and growing your business, take some time out and reconnect with your friends and family, share a few jokes, or watch your favorite comedy.

Every time you are able to find some humor in a difficult situation you're in, you will always win. Being able to laugh at ourselves and the situations we find ourselves in is a great deal.

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU SHIT
YOU MAKE KOOLAID

Lesson #32

Be like Forest Gump

Jack is a big movie fan, especially American movies where the hero wins at the end (he has said that he prefers them to Chinese movies in which the hero tends to die). Of all the movies he enjoys watching, Jack found the most inspiration from Forest Gump, the story of a determined but intellectually challenged character played by Tom Hanks. Jack sees one very important lesson in Forest Gump: never give up. He describes ***the character as simple yet determined***, and these are qualities that Jack embodies and encourages everyone to be like.

Forest Gump may not be the first business role model you think of, but if he's inspirational enough for Jack Ma, you can probably learn a thing or two from him. Despite his huge disadvantages in life, Gump was determined to do what he had in mind. If you feel that you have finally found your calling in life, go for it and run like the wind.

Lesson #33

Train your Mind and Body

Jack is often said to be highly moved by martial arts and kung Fu movies and their values.

It's no secret that Jack Ma is a huge practitioner of Kung Fu and Tai Chi, and once told journalists that he wants to be remembered not only as a businessman but also as a Tai Chi master. Alibaba's employees have to take part in a compulsory lesson in Tai Chi, learning how to balance their minds and remaining calm during challenges and adversity.

The values of physical and mental toughness are vast, both in life and in business. While many top entrepreneurs emphasize on strength & strength alone, Jack stands firm on his focus on flexibility, calmness of the mind and a strategic yet flexible approach towards the competition.

Lesson #34

The Tao of Jack

In order to apply the Tao of Jack, you need to understand the three precepts of his approach.

Harnessing the universal law of Yin and Yang, push and pull, or give and take, Jack is able to respond flexibly to each situation, making the necessary adjustments to keep Alibaba competitive and strong. This approach means that you have to train your mind to be aware of itself and its environment.

Without a sense of open mindedness, you will fail to see what's really happening. Just like a lapse of concentration while you're meditating or practicing Kung Fu can drastically impair your ability to make the right judgement.

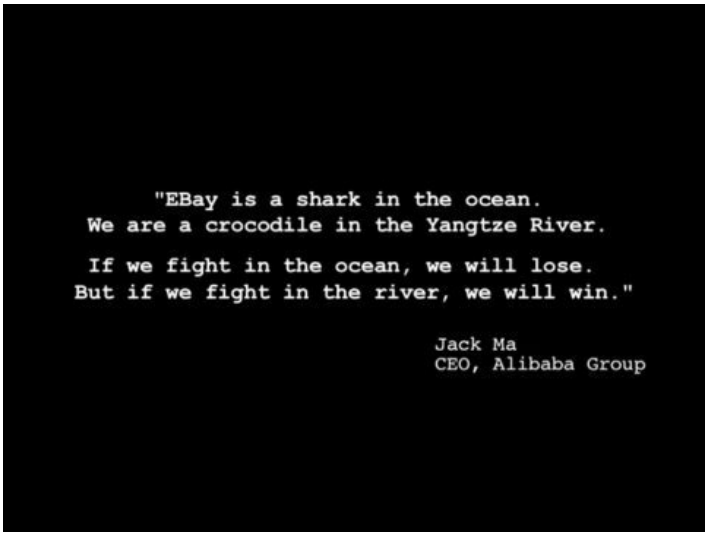
First, Alibaba is not a retailer but an internet platform that allows buyers and sellers to conduct trade anywhere around the world. This asset-light approach means that it holds no inventory.

Second, Jack acts as an ambassador rather than a CEO. He promotes the virtues of global trade by uplifting small businesses as his direct owners. He embraces the competitiveness of the business landscape in China by accepting and responding by playing in the world stage.

Third, Jack plans to retire to let the young and upcoming leaders of tomorrow shape the destiny of Alibaba. He understands the dynamic flow of life, just as good health depends on an unimpeded flow of new blood, a company's hallmark holds true as well.

Lesson #35

Use your natural advantages



When Jack launched Alibaba, there were no Chinese ecommerce sites on the internet as a benchmark to learn from. Realizing that he was in unchartered waters, competing with the likes of eBay from his small apartment in Hangzhou, Jack decided to be the crocodile instead of the shark in the Yangtze River.

EBay's presence in China was growing fast after they bought a stake in Each.Net, a Chinese eBay clone. It started stealing Jack's customers from right under their noses. Hence, they created Taobao, Alibaba's e-commerce site to directly compete with eBay.

As eBay increased their investments to $150 million, they controlled at least 85% of the market in China. Taobao just received a mere 1 million yuan but Jack was ready to position it as the first Chinese internet company better suited for their audiences and allowed sellers to put products on their platform for free (for the next 3 years)

Alibaba declared war on eBay by employing a series of measured publicity stunts like the army-themed day where employees dressed up in military outfits to go to work. That won them some free press.

Being the underdog, the only way Jack could stand up to a giant was to

improve and slash features that the Chinese audience desired.

Being born and bred in China turned out to be a huge advantage, giving Jack the ability to personalized flashy cartoons on the site that portrayed their rivals as the “foreign enemy” while dominating the Chinese market through personal myths and legends. Its site started to gain more consumer trust because of its local interpretations.

The company started to use more publicity stunts like concerts to win over China’s optimistic youth. Finally, Taobao grew so much to the point that they were neck-and-neck in the early 2005.

Remarkably, Jack has maintained Alibaba’s dominance in the Chinese market despite many eBay emerging to challenge its position at the top. Today Alibaba is China’s largest online retailer by far, as it strengthened further when Yahoo bought a $1 billion stake in the company. Taobao finally passed the eBay market share in 2006.

When you’re starting out, you may not have a huge reputation or credibility, but you have your own unique set of skills and advantages. Learn to identify the things that you do better than anyone else, and put them to good use. You’ll soon discover a huge competitive advantage that you never knew you had.

Lesson #36

Hire on merit - and don’t discriminate

“If we are a good team and know what we want to do, one of us can defeat ten of them.” **– Jack Ma**

Alibaba is considered to be one of the most progressive employers in East Asia, with just under 50% of its workforce and over 20% of its senior management being staffed by female employees.

Jack has always promoted his employees based on ability, ignoring their gender and ethnicity to create a truly egalitarian workforce. He admits that this wasn’t always his way of thinking, with his original business philosophy favoring expert executives hired from the outside while his employees had a glass ceiling beyond which they couldn’t progress.

As time went by, Jack realized that his approach was limiting innovation, development and vision; so he started promoting home-grown talent to key decision making positions. The results for Alibaba, and for gender equality in China, speak for themselves.

The issue of discrimination in the workplace is far from over in most countries, and we have a responsibility to hire and promote employees according to their abilities and not how they look. By hiring and promoting the right people, you’ll be setting up the perfect conditions for your success while creating a diverse environment where the best ideas can incubate.

Lesson #37

Make sure your employees are smarter than you

What do you have as the leader that an employee doesn't?

The humility to admit that you are not the best for every position

Jack has always had this uncanny sense in developing his employees and flowing power from the top downward, and when it comes to hiring new talent he is very clear about one thing: **they need to be smarter than him**.

While some leaders may be threatened by employees who threaten their position, Jack is the complete opposite from that. In his opinion, an employee who knows as much as you do or less isn't worth hiring. You do not want to hire a bunch of YES man who would sing to every tune you play. Your team is the source of great ideas, innovation, and inspiration where you can tap into anytime. ***'Hire, if he can be your boss in 5 years'*** this is his mantra.

Lesson #38

Grow inner values - mind, body, spirit and culture

"You never know that the things you're doing are that meaningful to society." ***– Jack Ma***

One of Jack's most passionate values is his belief in developing the inner mind and spirit along with the body. He translates this philosophy into a unique approach to business, where company culture and ethos is more important than Alibaba's sheer size.

Jack also applies this belief in the realm of economics, with a firm belief that China's slowing economy will give the country and its entrepreneurs an opportunity to focus on quality instead of quantity. He is passionate about green technology, and has spoken out against pollution and other environmentally degrading practices in his home country, while supporting government efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions and reverse climate change.

Lesson #39

Have a good name

According to his own recollection, Jack came up with Alibaba's name one day when he was having lunch in a San Francisco restaurant. He had been thinking about a global name for his global business that would connect China to the rest of the world, and Alibaba had sprung to mind.

Always a fan of ground-testing his ideas, he called up a waitress and asked her what she knew about Ali Baba. She replied "open sesame", a phrase from the story of Alibaba and the forty thieves, and this convinced Jack that the name was relevant and memorable.

Jack reflects on the name as his mission to open up opportunities for small business owners to sell their products.

He has also said, *half jokingly*, that a company name beginning with the letter **A** will always be at the top of the list. In Alibaba's case, this has definitely proved to be true.

Lesson #40

Customers first, employees second, shareholders last

Jack Ma's unique business philosophy can be summed up in the order of priorities that he has set for Alibaba. Unlike many corporations that are run for the benefit of banks and shareholders alone, his organization places customer satisfaction at the very top of the pyramid.

It's the customer who pay us the money, it's the employees who drive the vision, and it's the shareholders who when the [financial] crisis comes, these people ran away. My customers and my people stayed." – **UpStart Business Journal, April 16, 2014**

Once their customers are happy, Jack ensures that his employees are motivated & content as well. Doing so will drive innovation further to accelerate the growth of the company.

"*Let the Wall Street investors curse us if they wish, we will stick to this principle...*" **Jack ma ~ Bloomberg 2014.**

This focus on customers and employees has produced record-breaking results, including the biggest IPO in history in 2014, and shareholders were

rewarded as a consequence.

Alibaba's stock based compensation rewarded their employees about 15% of their annual revenue, whereas Amazon only hands out about 2% to its 230,000 workforce – **Fortune**.

Jack reiterated his point countless of times in each interview, and he doesn't care if their shareholders regret buying into the company, *"they can sell us if they regret..."*

According to Jack's business philosophy, customers and employees have always shown him loyalty that most shareholders couldn't match. His order of priorities is a special way of showing appreciation to the two groups that help build Alibaba from scratch.

Jack Ma's huge success is no accident - it is the result of decades of hard work, planning, exceptional people skills, and a flexible response to changing market conditions.

Wrapping It up

As Jack Ma says, short-term passion is worthless, be sure you're in it for the long haul. But this is his gospel and they don't necessarily guarantee success. Nevertheless, Jack has always thought of ways to improving society as a whole, while a businessman only has money in his mind. That's the major difference.

By understanding Jack's approach towards life, business and management, we can gain some insights into what it takes to become a Maverick Entrepreneur. As he continues to grow Alibaba and expand into new industries, his message and influence is vital for the younger generation of social entrepreneurs.

Find like-minded people who are hungry for success rather than those who have already made it. Act like a wise leader and not the most intelligent one around. It is better to be wise than be the one who knows it all. A wise leader always believes that there are smarter people out there; therefore he/she is never complacent.

Even if you're struggling in your business right now,

Even if you've spent years trying to get your business to work,

Even if you've thoughts of throwing in the towel at times,

Don't give up. Be a survivor. Entrepreneurship is all about weathering the storms and going into one battle after another just to see your dreams come true.

If your big & hairy audacious goals are too far-flung, try setting a more realistic goal first, then gradually make your way up the list.

But never ever give up.

I hope you learned something; I certainly did. If you have anything to add, let me hear it in the reviews. I look forward to a good discussion.

If you genuinely feel that you benefited from this book,
I would appreciate the little support you can give by:

- *Leaving a feedback*
- *Sharing it with your peeps*

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