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5 Things I've Learned

THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE * AS TOLD TO KRISTIN BURNHAM

Chris Gardner knows what it takes to be successful in business. Once homeless, he's now the founder and CEO of Gardner Rich, a private stock-brokerage firm, and author of the autobiography-turned-movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*.

Sometimes big risks are worth taking.

I started my business out of my house with \$10,000. It was a bold move, and some thought I was crazy. I didn't have a lot of money, nor did I have a college degree, so I had to figure out how to get people to do business with me. It took some time, but eventually I saw my company growing. I started hiring more people and doing more business. That's one risk that had a great payoff.

Don't doubt yourself.

If you want to be world-class at something—anything—there are two things you need: an all-or-nothing mentality and a passion for what you're doing. There should be no plan B. Back-up plans are what you put in place when there's doubt in your mind that you can't achieve what you're setting out to do.

Passionate people make the best employees.

Some of the biggest mistakes I've made were in hiring. I've learned that the most successful hires are those who have a genuine love for what they do—that's something you can't teach them. The worst people you can hire? Family members. Don't ever do it.

Mentoring can be a powerful influence for everyone involved.

When I was on *Oprah* to promote the movie, she spent the first 30 minutes of the show interviewing Will Smith and his son, and the last 30 minutes with me. When I was introduced, I kept telling

myself to be cool because I *knew* Oprah would try to make me cry. And I was cool for a whole 27 minutes! And then she said, "OK Chris, now we have someone who wants to thank you." Then they brought out my very first intern, and I lost it. Mentoring is one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling things that I do. I've had some young people who've worked for me go on to do some very special things in their career.

I have a love/hate relationship with technology.

I'm the guy who calls the IT department in a panic and says, "What the f*** is wrong with this thing?!" My business is fast-paced, and I need things to work. When people ask if there's a piece of technology I can't wait to get my hands on, I tell them I'm saving up for something big. A "Citation X"—a jet that will get me from coast to coast in four hours. Now that's my kind of technology.

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