

Conversation with Jeffrey Donenfeld

Investment Manager at
Boomtown Accelerators

Looking for a Few Good Entrepreneurs

April 1, 2020



1. What problem is your business solving?

At [Boomtown](#) we focus on founder preparedness and work with startup founders to provide them with the tools and experiences they need to make the best decisions and put their best foot forward. We are a startup accelerator based in Boulder, Colorado and Atlanta, Georgia. Our goal is to point companies in the right direction and provide a partnership to drive success in their business.

To do that we run 12-week long accelerator programs that consist of classes, workshops, and lectures. We invest in these companies and provide them with the perks of being a part of a global accelerator network by connecting them with mentors and industry experts. Companies reap the benefits of being exposed to startups and entrepreneurs in our investor network through our demo day and other resources. After the twelve weeks, we touch base with each company so we can continue to provide value for the life of the startup into the foreseeable future.

Here in Boulder, we also run a healthcare-centered accelerator in partnership with Copic and hardware and connectivity-focused accelerator in partnership with Comcast Labs and Cable Labs UpRamp. In Atlanta, we are corporate partners with Comcast, NBC Universal, and run a general tech program called the Farm. Our newest sports tech accelerator is with Comcast and NBC Universal focusing on sports tech.

Working with big corporate partners is a great way for us to provide entrepreneurs with resources they wouldn't get otherwise. By partnering and collaborating with these partners and not just using their name but really working with them for their expertise and connections is a powerful way to give entrepreneurs and businesses an even better start to their companies.

2. What obstacles have you faced in your business/endeavor?

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strong launch for our first sports tech cohort this coming fall.

Our cohorts in Boulder are typically 10 companies but we do have the freedom to invest in more or less based on who we feel we can help and what the best situation will be for all the companies. There are a number of ways to define success in venture capitalism and entrepreneurship. Ultimately there is a stakeholder return. But we can take an even larger view and look to build business and pathologies that can help shape the future of humanity.

We want to support these entrepreneurs who are putting themselves out there. It's really great to be able to help.

3. How have external advice and partnerships impacted your business decisions?

Everything I do is based on external advice, help, and research. In picking startups, I do a lot of looking and research, I go to a lot of conferences and public speaking events, and I stay up on the news. External sources are very valuable.

4. What tools have you used to grow professionally?

[For me, personally, I used a graduate program to earn my MBA which I feel has been helpful in my career.](#) It's provided me with a lot of information and insight in the business world. I am also very interested in science and technology and appreciate working with engineers, scientists, and inventors to really understand how technologies are developed.

One experience that I have had that I believe has shaped my career immensely is the work I have done as part of the United States Antarctic Program in Antarctica. I spent one season in the South Pole and one on an expedition in the most remote corner of Western Antarctica to service the deepest ice drill in the world. I had the opportunity to work with the United States military, the National Science Foundation, many scientists, and many industrial people. It was incredibly influential.

I also go to as many conferences as I can and talk to entrepreneurs all day. I almost always speak at events, join panels, or participate as a thought leader to engage with those there. Experience is so important, I never want to limit my advice or scope. Experiences are all about what you take out of them and take away from them, it's about how you apply what you've learned.

5. How has social media impacted your business?

We have a social media presence. In terms of my role, I manage the deal flow department. We work on many different channels and online repositories like Crunchbase, FXS, Angellist, BetaList, and so on. We're on social and do a ton of email outreach to connect with our networks and attend events. We get excellent value from social media.

But in terms of efficiency, I really think our best leads come from personal, real-world connections and talking to people. Connecting with people on the phone and getting offline really yields the best quality connections in terms of deal flow. Getting referrals from our alumni, mentors, and corporate partners have a lot of weight.

6. What was the best and worst piece of advice you have received as you were starting your business?

Show up and take meetings. It's important to show up to places, go to events, and not be a flake. Show up and be present with people. When people want to see you or talk to you, you need to make time to make it happen because it can be a really powerful connection. It's

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I also believe in being able to do what you set your mind to. It wasn't easy to get my job in Antarctica but I made it happen and it changed my life. It wasn't easy to get this job here at Boomtown either. I started as an intern and started working on things that I was passionate about and aligned itself with the things that we were focusing on as a company. It worked out but it takes a lot of hard work.

7. What are your biggest sources of inspiration? What drives you to identify with what Boomtown is doing?

Being a part of Boomtown and being able to invest in early-stage tech startups is really an opportunity to support technologies and businesses and entrepreneurs that are valuable and doing good work. That can be judged from many different perspectives: culture, business, humanity. It's amazing to have a small impact on that and help make small decisions. We're doing small things but they could have a huge impact on developing these technologies and businesses. Even if something is small, like an email or a blog, and isn't necessarily scalable, we're supporting the company and their future.

We have the potential to have a huge impact and magnify what we are doing—it's a neat opportunity to have. From a personal growth perspective, to do my job, interviewing tech startups, requires me to understand different technologies and business models and people. I geek out over all of these areas of science, technology, business, and culture.

8. What are your personal or leadership goals for the next five years?

Striking a good work-life balance is a personal and professional goal for me and also being able to both advance my career and do truly valuable work and build a company that I like a lot.

9. What do you do out of the office?

I travel a lot, I was just in Southeast Asia. I've been to about 80 countries, all seven continents. I try to stay out and about because I think it's important and valuable. Travel really gives you perspective on everything. I go to a number of international conferences and have been working with the US State Department and American Council for International Development which connects entrepreneurs all over the world. It's cool to get out there and see what other countries and people all over the world are thinking about. Entrepreneurs in India pitch in a different way than those in Saudi Arabia or South America, it's important to understand where these people are coming from, their culture, their values, and communication differences.

10. What are your hopes for your business for the next five years?

I hope to keep building my portfolio as we expand our programs and scope to continue bringing value to companies. I think it's really important. In terms of Boomtown, we have hardware, health tech, general tech at the Farm and are launching sports tech in the fall. We're looking forward to continuing to expand into new industries.

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