

You Only Have One Rival: It's You!

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All entrepreneurs want to be successful. While the definition of success may look different for each, you must set yourselves up for everlasting and everchanging market competition. The problem is that this ongoing competition can be stressful and take much out of you. Therefore, our research aimed to better understand how competitiveness pans out in entrepreneurs' lives. For this reason, we interviewed 32 experienced and committed founders in Australia. The findings reveal that competitiveness has many faces with different implications.

In our study, participants stated that external rivalry was huge in the early days of the venture. Founders were primarily occupied with the notion of beating their market competitors to the punch.

"Competitiveness was a big part of my motivation when I started my own business. I wanted to beat my former partners, make sure I won."

Yet, the founders' orientation shifted when the venture reached a more mature stage.

"I literally do not think about the competition. I couldn't care less. It doesn't drive me anymore. Whereas it was 100 percent the reason before."

From that point on, we identified two dominant types of competitiveness. One type of entrepreneur was driven by the **desire to win**, while the other primarily **competed with the self**. It was all about beating their own past performance personally and in a business sense.

"One wants to be the best at what one can be. When you want better yourself, better the company, better the product, better growth prospects, and better employee satisfaction. I think in every kind of aspect of your life, you want to improve on what were you say, 12 months back."

To put it short: our study found that entrepreneurs are driven by distinct *competitiveness types* that evolve over time. So, why is that?

When setting up your first company, you might feel the strong urge to prove that you can do it; for yourself and others. To satisfy this urge, you tend to seek validation and legitimacy. You use your direct market competitors as your primary orientation measure. As such, your initial reference point is mainly external.

However, over time, this orientation is likely to change. Once you have oriented yourself, you know where you stand in the trophy ranks. With a validated standing and (hopefully) boosted self-belief, your **competitiveness orientation** gradually shifts focus to more internal references. One type of individual feels a strong personal desire to win over others. Whether it's winning a new project, closing the next deal, or just winning a board game. If you identify with this type, you gain personal enjoyment by outperforming others.

The other type is more of a learner aiming to enhance oneself somehow. While winning feels excellent for you as well (of course it does), it's not your primary source of motivation. If you identify with this 'enhancement' type, you probably find great satisfaction in exploring your own

growth potential, testing your limits, and **beating your own past performance**. Although both competitive orientations strive to be successful, the implications are different. The question is, why is this important for you?

It has been established that people with a strong urge to win are associated with lower self-esteem, high mistrust, and modest psychological health. Although you experience the highest highs when winning, these highs are often short-lived. After the deal is before the deal. In contrast, as an 'enhancement' type, you enjoy the highs more sustainably since you invest in your personal growth trajectory instead of beating others. The 'enhancement' type usually finds great enjoyment in their job, and consequently, it's easier to pull through the hard times. They build up much-needed resilience to continuously overcome challenges. Likewise, this competitive type is connected to higher psychological health, self-esteem, self-discovery, and goal achievement! And undoubtedly, goal achievement is closely linked to what you value as success.

So, you have succeeded, and your business is up and running? You are meeting payrolls? Congratulations! We'd recommend from now on, don't anchor yourself too much on what your competitors are doing. Or winning for the sake of beating others. Instead, focus on beating your own past performance to improve tomorrow's achievement. The benefits speak for themselves.

Lastly, we believe what is true for entrepreneurs also applies to executives, managers, or employees within established organizations. If we better understand individual competitiveness orientations, leaders can use this insight for their benefit. For example, while you might want to hire a personal-growth oriented person for business development, a person driven by the strong urge to win might be your best asset in sales. In the end, we all want to achieve what we have set ourselves up to, no? So, who's your rival today?

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