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Meet the MasterMinds: Guy Kawasaki on *The Art of the Start*

Guy Kawasaki is co-founder and managing director of Garage Technology Ventures, an early-stage venture capital firm, and a columnist for *Forbes.com*. Previously, he was an Apple Fellow at Apple Computer, where he was one of the people responsible for the success of the Macintosh.

Kawasaki is the author of eight books, including *Rules for Revolutionaries*, *How to Drive Your Competition Crazy*, *Selling the Dream*, *The Macintosh Way*, and his most recent work, *The Art of the Start*. He's also a consultant and a speaker.

MCNews asked Kawasaki for some tips on getting started—on a new venture or a new direction.

MCNews: What one piece of advice would you offer a consultant starting a new firm?

Kawasaki: Remember one thing: Giving advice is easy, but implementation is hard work. The ultimate value of a consulting firm rests on the results that you help clients achieve. If the results are good, then the consulting firm is good. If the results are mediocre, then the firm is mediocre. Life is tough.

MCNews: What would you advise consulting firms to do to improve their positioning?

Kawasaki: Make a 2 x 2 chart. The vertical axis measures the ability of the firm to provide unique services. The horizontal axis measures the value of this service. You want to be high on the vertical axis and far to the right on the horizontal axis. This is the key to positioning: Figure out how to get high and to the right—so that you are providing a great service and only you can do it.

If you can't explain why you're in that corner in less than thirty seconds, you either have a crappy practice or you need to perfect your positioning statement. I hope it's the latter.

MCNews: You've listened to thousands of pitches/proposals for new ventures. What about them needs improvement, and what seems to work well?

Kawasaki: Most pitches remind me of a big airplane trying to take off. It lumbers down the runway—with engines screaming—and shudders as it finally takes off just before the runway ends. By contrast, pitches should take off fast—afterburners blazing!

To use another analogy, if most pitches were movies, you'd leave after the first twenty minutes. Typically people start off by talking about their background, the history of the company, and the

size of the market. Twenty minutes later, they still haven't explained what the company does. By then, eyes are starting to roll up into heads, and people have lost interest.

Unless you have an astounding background ("I created the system that enables Fed Ex to sort two million packages a day," or "I got a PhD in computer science from MIT at the age of 14"), cut the bull and get to the essence of any proposal: Exactly what product or service are you selling?

MCNews: When you evaluate investment opportunities, what personal attributes do you look for in the person making the pitch, and which ones turn you off?

Kawasaki: The personal attributes that attract me most are an extremely fast chip in peoples' brains and a love of what they do in their hearts. I don't care very much about their background, that is, their "on paper" educational or work experience.

Two things turn me off. The first is arrogance—whether it's arrogance about their past, present, or future. The second is long-windedness. An arrogant, longwinded person is the kiss of death.

MCNews: What excites you about a written proposal? And, what makes you just toss it in the pile with all the others?

Kawasaki: I like to read proposals that catalyze fantasy—that make you think, "I would love to buy one of those or use that service." It means I don't have to figure out if some CIO wants this piece of enterprise software or whether some chip design I can't comprehend means anything.

I like stuff that will change people's lives quickly and directly—that you and I can buy in stores or online in less than a year.

MCNews: The term "rainmaker" is reserved for a small number of consultants who bring in the most work for a firm. Does the rainmaker label have to be reserved for the minority?

Kawasaki: I'm a naïve, romantic when it comes to rainmaking. I believe in Guy's Golden Touch—which means that whatever is gold, Guy touches. The key to rainmaking is a great product or service, not being a slick MBA in a black mock turtleneck in a German car. So if you want to make it rain, have a great service. The rest is easy.

MCNews: In the final exercise of your book, you ask readers to write down the three things they want people to remember about them. What are those three things for you?

Kawasaki: First, that I was a good father. Second, that I was a good husband. And third, that I empowered entrepreneurs to change the world.

MCNews: Finally, what's on your reading list these days?

Kawasaki: I read to escape. I like books where spies are killed and diabolical enemies are plotting the end of the United States. And a retired Navy Seal or FBI agent is called back from retirement to save the world working alongside a blonde crime scene investigator in a nuclear submarine.

MCNews: Thanks for your time.

You can find out more about Guy Kawasaki, his books and his services at www.artofthetart.com.