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The Entrepreneur

Stanley I. Mason, Jr.

Stanley I. Mason, Jr. has had an incredible impact on our lives. This article describes his journey to becoming an inventor and entrepreneur.

Entrepreneur is a title given rather freely to any person who directs his¹ own work. An entrepreneur may take direction from another, but not easily. I learned that I did not take direction easily from others and that I did not "fit" well in a corporate cubicle. After many tries I have been a successful entrepreneur for the last thirty years.

From my experience I've learned that entrepreneurs don't accept anything blindly. Entrepreneurs always run directions from another through their own filter and accept, reject, or partially reject, one or the other depending on his or her own belief system. They don't accept anything as gospel. They always have an on-going internal dialog to help make decisions of which way to go.

These are the reasons it is so difficult to be an entrepreneur. There are no "givens." Every choice is carefully considered and judged... not by what is right or wrong, not by "what is best for me?" but what is the best choice in this situation, at this time, with all the present aspects in place.

The entrepreneur is one who lives fully, eating all kinds of foods, dancing all kinds of dances, and traveling everywhere possible in the world. He talks to everyone as a long-lost friend, telling his secrets easily. He sings all kinds of songs and makes up his own puzzles to solve by himself.

The entrepreneur loves everyone and especially one person. He is difficult to love, though, because he is different every day and every hour.

The entrepreneur makes decisions quickly because he resolves each question down to two choices, then picks the choice he personally likes. If he finds that the choice is wrong after a while, he changes to the other choice.

The entrepreneur spends money quickly because he knows the world is filled with many opportunities from which he may choose. He chooses quickly, also for the same reason.

The entrepreneur is a great reader and student. He knows there is a world of information and secrets in publications and reads voraciously to gain knowledge and advantage.

The entrepreneur doesn't engage in gambling, doesn't join any game he cannot win. He works for advantage. He can imagine a building or structure or a giant company, then actually draw it and create it. The entrepreneur can create a thought for changing the future. He knows how to present the thought to others and have them enthusiastically tackle and physically complete the thought in real time.

The entrepreneur is always the same: as a child, as a student, in college, or working for somebody else.

The entrepreneur can understand his own thoughts and make things work for himself or for others of their choosing, even if it makes no sense to anybody else.

My own experience as an entrepreneur began when I was a senior in college and my intended, Charlotte, had just graduated. I proposed marriage and she responded with a conditional "yes." "Get a better job and the deal is done!"

I immediately quit my night job in Trenton's (New Jersey) Free Public Library, and analyzed the organizations in Trenton.

I selected John A. Robeling's Wire Mill and telephoned them. They said they had no jobs, but suggested I call the American Steel and Wire Company across the street from Robeling's.

I called American Steel and Wire and was invited for an interview. I could do many jobs because my father, who had his own electrical business, trained me. He taught me carpentry, and many other jobs.

American Steel and Wire's master mechanic, the person who kept the factory running, fixing all

that did not work, interviewed me. The interview took place in his office, which had a drafting board and a T-square but no draftsman.

I was hired as a draftsman and became a very good one.

In two weeks I drifted around the factory alone. I learned about the products the company made—cables to build bridges, airplane control cables, and everything else made of wire.

I soon realized that a man guided big vertical spools of wire with a stick into the diamond die. When the spools were full, the diameter was big and one rotation pulled a lot of wire through the die. A half-hour later, the spool was newly empty and the wire zapped through the die. The wire had one speed, yet it rotated differently.

I had just bought a level-winding fishing reel and immediately saw the connection between the hank's speed and the fishing reel. I talked to my boss and made a sketch for him. The boss told me to take the drawing down to the shop and have them build my machine.

I did take it to the shop and they followed that nineteen-year-old's sketch and made a big machine, 5 feet square, out of angle iron and diamond floor plate.

It worked great! The guy with the stick got another job.

I realized that though I had solved the feed problem at the die, my machine went too fast. I went to a junkyard and bought a '32 Plymouth's three-speed transmission. I owned a link-belt variable speed drive and I had the shop put a 5-hp electric motor on the variable speed transmission, and the three-speed Plymouth transmission on the other end. That also worked.

I then had them put the motor and transmission together with the much enlarged fishing reel and it worked very well.

Enough said. The factory multiplied my machine ten times and all went well! The people in the wire drawing department were all happy and I was invited to eat my sandwiches with the men on the factory floor.

The factory received its new materials in the shape of large rolls of $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch diameter "rods" containing about 200 feet per roll. Each rod had to be carried by a tractor from the warehouse, a big undertaking because it weighed over a ton.

I thought, if you built a rail on the left wall and another on the right wall, you could put a moveable crane on top and run it up and down

and back and forth with a control button on a wire. You could pick up a roll of wire and a man could pull it from one end of the warehouse himself... over the top of all the rolls on the floor of the warehouse.

I made my sketch and again the boss said, "Make it." So I did.

About this time World War II started in earnest and women were hired to work. The factory had no toilets for them, so I sketched a bathroom with fifteen stalls. Where to put it? I designed poles (over the machines) and built the bathroom in the air! It worked.

I learned that half the number of women required twice the same number of toilets that the men did. A real formula.

I realized that I was able to visualize in my head different views of things that didn't exist. I learned to make drawings of these thoughts in such detail that I could explain to supervisors things which had never been made.

This fact is very important to entrepreneurship. As an entrepreneur I realized I had great power. I could think about a new product or a way of accomplishing a task, then sketch it in such a complete way as to convince another person that the thought could work, that it was practical and moreover, useful and of such value as to demand to take action and make it in three dimensions.

While I was still a senior in college, Pearl Harbor occurred. My whole class was motivated to join the service. I always wanted to fly, so I went to town and joined the Naval Air Corps. I was not to be called up for active duty until graduation—about three months.

Later, I was walking by a store window when I spied a drawing of an aircraft carrier, with an airplane spiraling down to land. Suddenly I thought, "What if I'm flying out over the ocean and return to the aircraft carrier out at sea, and it is not there?" I immediately went to the Army Air Corps recruiting office and joined up. The navy never said anything. Neither did I.

My wife got a job teaching third grade. I graduated from college and went into the Air Corps—where I learned to fly. It was a great experience. I was made an instructor because I had a fresh degree in teaching and it was just what was wanted.

My wife gave up teaching school and joined me in Alabama, where I was teaching flying. She gave birth to our first son there.

One day she asked me to put the diaper on the baby. I held up the cloth diaper. It was square. I looked at the nude baby. The baby was round. I realized it was an engineering problem to put on the diaper. It didn't really fit. This was a problem I solved later on.

Three years later I read an ad for an engineer in a St. Louis newspaper. It was placed by Glenn L. Martin, the aircraft pioneer. I answered the ad and was invited for an interview. I was hired and immediately began the paperwork to be released from duty. I was director of training for a whole airfield, Scott Field in Illinois, so the release process took some time.

My wife and I were living in a new house trailer on a farm across the road from Scott Field. Suddenly the 5 acres next to us was declared excess and the barracks were removed. It left long rectangular concrete pads scattered around with asphalt roads connecting the pads, with fireplugs here and there.

This is another example of where the spirit of entrepreneurship showed itself. I thought what a great trailer park this would make. We could put the trailers on the concrete pads then build bathrooms and a laundry building and rent out all the pads. Another first lieutenant, Bill, lived in a trailer. We formed a fifty-fifty partnership and began work.

The first problem was the land. We decided to lease it. The second problem was water. I opened a manhole cover in the highway across the road and found a valve down there. I climbed down and turned it on. The water went out and over to our property and fireplugs spouted water. We turned them off and, installed some spigots on each one, and there was water to every pad.

Soon my partner and I began to erect the laundry buildings. While we would do our required flying each day, we became impatient to land. We were anxious to go back home to work on the trailer park.

But Bill and I would argue about every point where a decision was required. It truly slowed us down, almost to the point of wanting to quit the partnership.

One day we were on the roof of the laundry building, fighting as usual. This time we were at odds over whether the eaves should be long or short and whether they should extend out to carry the water or be shorter to save material.

I thought of a solution. I realized we were losing time arguing over each thought. I turned to Bill and said, "Let's discuss each point. You pick your decision. I will think about the point and pick my decision. We will discuss the plusses and minuses of each way, yours and mine. If they are the same, we will go ahead. If they differ, then we will flip a coin, heads for my idea, tails for yours.

"We will proceed this way. If it turns out that your idea was better after trying it, we'll change our thinking and review the way we are doing the tasks." It worked and we doubled our speed and completed the whole project using this conflict-resolution method.

About this time I got the Martin Aircraft offer and arranged to leave Scott Field. Bill and I added up our costs and my partner paid me \$2,700 for my share of this investment. The park was worth about \$30,000 at this point.

I pulled my trailer to Baltimore where Martin Aircraft was located. In three days we were in Baltimore. I picked up my mail at the company's headquarters. There was a letter from Bill.

The morning after we left he had heard water running and stepped out of bed up to his knees in water. The Mississippi River had quietly overflowed its banks 20 miles upstream and had backed up onto our 5-acre plot. Five acres of water, 6 feet deep, covered his trailer park. There was water everywhere!

Meanwhile, when I reported for work at the personnel office, I was told the job I had accepted no longer existed. The only position available at the company was an hourly job that paid \$1.35 per hour. When I told the personnel office staff I'd take it, they were flabbergasted. I was taken to a large engineering room with two hundred draftsmen, all working silently.

After working three days in that room, I realized that 90 percent of the draftsmen there were bald. I thought, "Must I stay here till I'm bald?"

I got permission from my boss to go to the personnel office where I told of my unhappiness. They suggested I take a battery of personnel tests to determine where I should be placed.

After scoring well on the tests, I was transferred to their training department and given a raise. After a year my boss, Norman Johnson, told me the company was in bad shape and that soon I would be laid off. He offered to help me find another job.

In preparation for creating my resume, Johnson suggested I take 3 x 5 cards and make a pile of the things I could do with some experience. I made almost one hundred cards with things like painting, drawing, plumbing, carpentry, running lathes, casting, metal, etc. I made another one hundred cards of the things I would like to do—things like writing ads, writing biographies, working in libraries, etc.

Then Johnson and I searched all kinds of industries for the type of company I should work for and the positions I should apply for. We made a list of one hundred companies and jobs then settled on five. Armstrong Cork, the linoleum company, was on the top because Cameron Hawley was the head of advertising, and Johnson and I agreed that I should be a copywriter of industrial ads for a consumer company with industrial products.

I drove 80 miles to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where Armstrong Cork was located. At lunch in a Lancaster hotel, I talked to the restaurant cashier about Armstrong and learned that it was the biggest company in Lancaster, was privately owned, and had a great reputation.

I drove to Armstrong's headquarters, went in and said hello to the woman at the front office and asked to see Mr. Hawley. She told me that I needed an appointment to see him. So I sat in the front office and watched the inside door of the office down the hall.

Pretty soon a tall man came out and went to the men's room. I got up and followed him.

While he was washing his hands, I said to him: "I'm here to see you, but the lady said I need an appointment!"

Hawley said, "Follow me, young man; I have a few moments."

We went out the door together, past the woman who tried to keep me out. He took me to his large office inside the big doors. His desk was gigantic—about 6 feet by 10 feet—with not a thing on it.

Hawley offered me a seat and asked me what I wanted. I sat and told him I wanted to work with him. He had just written and published *Executive Suite* which was being made into a movie. I'd read the book. It was about Armstrong Cork, but modified.

"We only hire people who come to us through the personnel department. But why would I even hire you? What can you do?" Hawley inquired.

I pulled out my pile of 3 x 5 cards and laid them out on his desk, row on row, and explained each one. Then I pulled out the other stack of what I wanted to do, and explained each of those to him.

Hawley sat back, then said, "Go down the hall to personnel and ask for Mr. Mason (no relation) and tell him I've hired you." We never talked money. I went down the hall and into personnel and met Mason. I told him what Hawley said.

"Young man we don't do it that way, said Mason. "We have a mansion—Armstrong Mansion—and we put all executive trainees there. I see you are married. We don't allow that. Mr. Hawley knows this."

"But," I said, "He said he had hired me."

Mason called Hawley and they talked and talked. In the end Mason had me fill out some forms then sent me back to advertising and Hawley.

I was given a glass cubicle, a desk, a typewriter, and a chair. I was introduced to Mr. Minet, my new boss, who gave me an assignment... to write a paragraph for an ad. I drove back to Baltimore and told my wife the good news.

Over the next week I wrote and rewrote the paragraph with "square copy" for Minet, and learned how Armstrong created advertising copy. I worked all day and night on ad copy and became quite expert.

One day Hawley and I happened to be in the men's room again. "I'm glad I saw you. We need to begin your company training and I want you to go to New York to see our advertising agency," he said.

A week later I took a train into New York City, and visited BBD&O, Armstrong's advertising agency, where I was to see Bruce Barton, the president.

I showed up at 8 AM but nobody was there except the janitor. I sat in the waiting room until finally he asked, "Who do you want?"

"Mr. Bruce Barton," I said.

"Why didn't you say so? Mr. Barton is in his office. It's right over there," said the janitor.

I walked over and opened one of the tall double doors, into a room 100 feet by 40 feet. Behind the desk was a white-haired, little man. He stood up and invited me in.

I walked to the desk. There were no carpets and my shoes made a loud click-clock sound.

Barton walked around the desk and we shook hands. I told him that Hawley had sent me to meet him.

I stood with Barton behind his desk. From wall to wall and floor to ceiling there was a large photo of the beach at Coney Island, with at least a million people all in their bathing suits looking at the camera.

Barton, with a sweep of his right hand, pointed at the crowd. "Here is your public... the people you write to. Don't forget it!" He told me about advertising and about TV and its future.

Seven months later, back at Armstrong, Hawley called together his twelve trainees and said, "We're going to have a contest. Imagine that I've invented a new product. It's a metal strip glued to a cork base. Please create an ad for this product." That's all he said, except that we'd have a review in six weeks. I had an evening assignment.

My days were taken by reading hundreds of one-hour plays that the Armstrong Theater was producing each week on network television. Several plays, which I picked, were produced and I went to New York to see them made. At that time, all television was live and it was quite exciting, especially to meet the actors. To be one of "the client's" people was a real thrill.

Meanwhile, I was working on my assignment. I named the product, developed specifications, and wrote the ads. There were 190 of them all typed and drawn according to Armstrong methods, with a signature at the right bottom of the page, with color illustrations of the product in use. It was a whole series of ads that told the product story.

The deadline came and we all went to the boardroom. Each trainee stood up and showed his ad and told his story. I was last because I was the newest person.

When my turn came, I opened my suitcase and pinned the ads on the wall around the room. It was quite a show, 190 full-color ads with copy beneath—all square copy, all with the Armstrong logo type. It looked like an ad agency presentation.

Hawley closed the meeting. No one said anything to me. I collected my ads and put them back in the suitcase.

The next morning I made an appointment with Hawley's secretary and saw him at 10 AM.

"What do you want?" he asked.

I said, "I realized yesterday that I'm much better than any of the people you have working as your trainees, and feel I deserve a raise."

"How much do you make?" he asked.

"\$485 a month," I replied.

He said, "What if I said no?"

I hadn't run this turn of events through in my mind. I said, "I hadn't thought of that."

Hawley stood up. "Good-bye Mr. Mason," he said.

Then he called in his secretary and told her that I'd be leaving. He had her set up a big luncheon for me and all of the employees in his department, 160 people.

It was a celebration luncheon. He told the group, "Stan Mason will never be happy in this department or this company. But we love him and wish him well!" The luncheon was terrific. It was a true celebration. But I was out of a job.

I called the Martin Company and asked for my previous boss. He was just about to quit his job to begin a new business and invited me to Baltimore. I immediately drove the 80 miles back there and was recommended to take his job.

I began work immediately, but also was interviewed for a public relations job, taking care of old Glenn L. Martin himself. I was responsible for writing news releases—but more especially I was to keep his name and pictures out of the newspapers and magazines. Martin was very newsworthy and attracted writers who wanted to link him with young actresses who appeared on his yacht.

I learned the PR business for about a year. One day I sat next to Palmer Calstrum while having lunch in the cafeteria. Calstrum was the man who had hired me in St. Louis.

Calstrum was looking for a person to promote to the job of chief of presentations at the internal advertising agency the company directed. I took the job and had one hundred writers and artists working for me.

I worked in this function for a year when my old boss, Johnson, called to ask if I would meet Orhum Small at a railroad station on the Pennsylvania Line toward New York.

I met Small and he told me he had a secret formula for a glue but didn't know what to do with it. (He was a VP of a large chemical company during the day.)

I began night work with Small, designing labels and writing detailed instructions on how to use the glue. Eventually I sold enough glue to

begin a business with Small. We rented a large empty store in Wilmington and went into business together and prospered, with me selling the glue all over the United States and hiring people to make, bottle, and sell the product.

That was the beginning of what is now Elmer's Glue, a white polyvinyl glue for book-binding and other uses. After three years I decided to go back to Martin because they wanted to hire me among thirty others to go to Florida and begin a new company making satellites. I sold my interest to Small and moved my family moved to Orlando.

In Florida I ran a large part of the company which we started in an empty hangar at the Orlando airport. We quickly hired many more people.

I was part of a team assigned to find and buy land on which to build a new factory. We bought 1,200 acres the same day Walt Disney bought his land for his new park. It adjoined Martin's land.

One evening one of the engineers held a great victory party outside. Suddenly we heard a radio announcement about Russia launching a satellite the size of a trolley car and that it was going to be over Cape Canaveral and Orlando in twenty minutes.

The group was electrified! We were working on a satellite the size of a basketball and here was a Russian satellite the size of a trolley.

We all ran outside and there was the satellite coming over the horizon, gleaming in the setting sun. It was twinkling and reflecting down on us. The party quickly broke up with all the people feeling dejected and defeated.

The very next day, Dr. Jerry Sarchet called from California and asked if I wanted to come to work with him and Norton Simon. I had worked with Sarchet in Baltimore, but had lost track of him after he left. He was now the psychologist at Hunt Foods.

I declined the invitation. I had read about Simon in *Fortune* magazine. He was known as the "wolf of Wall Street" because he was gobbling up small companies.

Sarchet called me three more times. The last time he invited me to visit California he said, "Why not come? You'll get a nice trip to California and a ride in the helicopter to visit Mr. Simon." So I finally accepted. Simon and his group of executives interviewed me for two days.

Simon asked what I wanted in pay. So I doubled my existing pay and Simon said okay. Then he drove me to the Los Angeles airport. We never did pick a job title or a job for me. He was just hiring talent.

I called Charlotte in Florida and told her we were moving to California. We now had four children and she wasn't very happy, but she did cooperate.

We went to California, built a new house, and I moved from job to job within the company, always reporting to Simon. I was in the advertising department, in charge of new products and special programs for Simon. We bought the Wesson Oil Company, *McCall's Magazine*, a railroad company, and several other smaller companies. I bought an airplane and flew it around California, landing at every airport. I even flew it to New York twice.

About this time I had been with Hunt Foods for five years, learning about all kinds of foods and packaging. One day Dr. Emile Libresco, who had been with Hunt Foods but left to go to the American Can Company, called me and invited me to join him there.

After calling me four or five times, he said, "How many national parks have you visited?"

"Two or three," I said.

"Make plans to visit all the parks across the country. We'll pay the cost," he said.

So with my family I drove across the country to New York, visiting national parks along the way.

American Can was located in New York, but had secretly bought land on the New York/Connecticut border and was about to build a new 2,000-person headquarters in Connecticut.

I assumed the position of vice president of Product Development, Advertising, and Public Relations. The R&D department was in disarray. It had 1,200 people working on 1,200 different projects.

I called a meeting of all the marketing VPs and asked them to prioritize all the projects, department by department. Then I assigned only the top five projects in each of the five departments, and made sure that was all they worked on. The confusion was worked out quickly and projects were quickly finished.

One of the projects I personally believed in was my own—the development of a form-fitted

disposable diaper. I designed the diaper, which created no waste in the manufacturing process. Then I developed the machinery, began marketing research, and had it patented.

One day the chairman called me to his office. I thought it was for raise. He said, "I understand you are working on a disposable diaper."

I said, "Yes."

"Don't you know that no one will ever use a disposable diaper?" He continued, "We got along without you before you came, and we'll get along after you leave. Good-bye."

I left the same day and called my wife. "It has happened again," I told her. She knew what I meant. I'd been fired. I asked her what we would do.

She suggested we go to Spain and sit on the

beach and decide what to do.

We did go to Spain. We did sit on the beach and we decided to begin our own company. We decided to divide our time in half, work on our own projects for half of the time and for clients the other half.

We converted our horse barn into a laboratory with tools and equipment and drawing boards. I set up an office over the garage.

Then the head of R&D at Johnson & Johnson called to ask if I would make a placenta basin for J&J. I did. He was the first client of Simco Inc., and that business relationship lasted for twenty years. For a listing of some of our clients, see Exhibit 1.

Since Simco's beginning I have invented over one hundred products, patenting fifty-five for the company's clients.

Exhibit 1 Partial Listing of Simco, Inc.'s Clients

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Alcan-Canada | Surgikos | Procter & Gamble |
| American Can | Vision Products (Vistakon) | Cascade |
| Dixie-Marathon | Kimberly-Clark | Tide |
| American Hospital Supply | Depend | Reebok |
| Beecham | Kotex | Richardson-Vicks |
| Bridgeport/Stamford Hospitals | Lehn & Fink | Clearasil |
| Chesebrough Pond's | Minwax | Oil of Olay |
| Colgate-Palmolive | Lipton | Vicks |
| Crown Zellerbach | Knox | S. C. Johnson |
| F. X. Matt Brewery | Wishbone | Schick |
| Frito-Lay | Lohmans | Scott Paper |
| General Electric | Mason Research Foundation | Baby Fresh |
| Hill's Pet Products | Chinese Tallow Project | Simco |
| Science Diet, | McDonald's | Bio-Pot |
| Prescription Diet | Nestle | Masonware |
| Hoechst Celanese | Neutrogena | Patio Planter |
| Hunt Foods | Nike | Soft Sheen Products |
| Hydrodent Laboratories | Norwegian Cannery Association | Tetley |
| James River | King Oscar | Tupperware |
| Jet Dry | Pepperidge Farms | Syroco |
| Johnson & Johnson Companies | Playtex Family Products | Vasogen |
| Acuvue, Surevue, Band-Aid | Apparel Group (Sara Lee) | Velcro Fastening Systems |
| StayFree, Sure & Natural | | Vidal Sasson |

Endnote

1. For simplicity, use of the male pronoun is used throughout this article.

NEJE

Mr. Mason holds a number of U.S. patents. Among his most famous are: the form-fitted disposable diaper, a touch-responsive portable intrusion alarm, cooking vessels for microwave oven cookery, a disposable full-face surgical mask, ultrasonic sealing apparatus, sanitary napkins (four patents), and trash and garbage compacting systems.