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| **The Seven Types of Start-Up Characters You Should Avoid** |  | 9/2/2004 |
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| **Bill Snow's *VC 101* sets early stage and wannabe entrepreneurs straight whether they like it or not. *VC 101* provides facts and opinions to dispel myths and misconceptions about venture capital, provides tips and guidance for companies seeking venture capital and examines real examples of successful and unsuccessful VC-seeking companies.**CHICAGO – Based on many years of working for and advising countless start-ups, I’ve compiled a list of the seven types of entrepreneurial personalities you should avoid. If you spent any time working for a start-up, you’ve probably run across these personality types. This is by no means a complete list of personality types. I’m sure there are many others. While the majority of characters who inhabit start-ups are positive people who do valuable work, there inevitably are a few negative creeps out there in the world of start-ups. I’ve often referred to them as the “knee-biters” of the world. These are the ones who are most apt to eventually post anonymous venom about formers employers on certain Web sites. Without further ado, here is my list of the seven types of start-up personalities you should avoid: 1) Expense Check Entrepreneurs (ECE)While this is a term I’ve used for a few years, it’s always worthwhile to repeat yourself from time to time. These people typically boast M.B.A.s from top-flight schools. They use big words and cutting-edge jargon. They are part of the gadget culture elite. Their heyday was 1995 to 2000, which coincided with the heyday of the venture capital and jackpot mentality boom years. ECE do not start companies. Rather, they latch themselves to start-ups (but still call themselves “founders”), and like a plague of zebra muscles, they tend to multiply by bringing in their buddies when they find a food source (read: expense checks). ECE love the cache and potential rewards that come with being an “entrepreneur”. Let’s face it: Saying “I’m an entrepreneur” is a great way to impress the chicks at parties. The only problem is that ECE don’t have the stomach for the risks that are associated with truly being an entrepreneur. In other words, they are only entrepreneurs so long as the $10,000-per-month expense checks are *de rigueur*. Once the going gets tough (when actual results are demanded) and once the expenses are reduced, these types immediately leave the entrepreneurial life behind. **Tagline: “I’m outta here” (emergency purposes only).** 2) Mt. EruptionAfter dealing with a Mt. Eruption, a beleaguered former colleague mentioned: “It seems every company has one.” As I thought about it, my former colleague was correct. Just about every company I’ve worked for has had that one person who goes nutso at the slightest provocation. They think nothing of yelling and screaming in front of others. This personality type is especially dangerous if the person has managerial responsibility. Mt. Eruption thinks nothing of it to dress down a subordinate in front of others. It becomes very difficult to work with this personality type because everyone has to walk on eggshells for fear of inadvertently offending this person (and, of course, setting off an eruption). A seemingly innocent little question will likely be rebuffed by a long-winded “it’s not my fault” response, which will likely segue into an *ad hominem* attack on the person asking the question. Naturally, if the question goes unasked, Mt. Eruption will eventually erupt over that fact. This is a person who displays classic passive-aggressive tendencies. After all, Mt. Eruption won’t let you know when you’re making a minor error and politely suggest a way of avoiding the error. Instead, life’s little “bumps in the road” are stored in the recesses of the brain. Only after a sufficient stockpile is obtained will the eruption occur. **Tagline: “FINE! LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I REALLY THINK OF YOU AND YOUR STUPID IDEA, YOU #$@%&!!!”** 3) Gloomy GusEverything is a disaster. Everything is wrong. It will never work. These are the hallmarks of the classic Gloomy Gus character. Forget the optimist versus pessimist dichotomy of “is the glass half full or half empty”. With Gloomy Gus, the glass is always completely frigging empty. I’ve long believed that people can be divided into two camps: optimist and pessimist. Gloomy Gus puts the typical pessimist to shame because even the typical pessimist has the dumb luck of having the occasional good day. Gloomy Gus doesn’t merely have a perpetual rain cloud over his head. The rain cloud is actually a bus used (allegedly) by the [Dave Mathews Band](http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20040826/ap_en_mu/bus_waste_8). **Tagline: “It’s raining. It’s pouring. It has never been worse!”** 4) The Grasshopper“Get paid and do no work” is the mantra of the grasshopper. As much as I wish I could claim the discovery of this character, it’s actually [*Dilbert*](http://www.dilbert.com) creator Scott Adams who created the best example of this character. His name is Wally. Calling this character grasshopper is a reference to the classic fable by Aesop. Just like Aesop’s grasshopper, this character is known for doing nothing, producing nothing and contributing nothing. The grasshopper comes to work at nine and goes home at five. The grasshopper puts in the minimum and certainly does not add any extra effort, ideas, thought or planning. The grasshopper doesn’t even try. For the life of me, I don’t know how these people continue to get jobs. I recall working with one grasshopper – a person who was paid considerably more than me for doing the same job, by the way – who simply and flat out replied “no” to anyone who asked anything of her. Can you contribute an article? No. Can you make a sales call? No. Can you work on this marketing literature? No. Do you have any ideas? No. I apparently missed the class in college that dealt with developing a six-figure career for doing nothing. She’s not the first, too. She’s also not the only grasshopper I’ve dealt with. I’m convinced there are entrepreneurs who pencil in a few slots for people who do nothing when putting together their business plans. Maybe they consider it a cost of doing business. **Tagline: “I’m taking off early. Do we get paid today?”** 5) Daffy the “Visionary”It’s one thing if you are actually a billionaire who has a rather “Looney Tunes” approach to life and business. It’s another thing if you haven’t amounted to anything and you willfully ascribe the “crazy visionary” moniker to yourself. It just doesn’t work that way, folks! The basic difference between being considered eccentric and crazy is, of course, money. If you’re able to pay people gobs of money and you engage in crazy (but mostly harmless) behavior, people will probably continue to work for you and simply call you eccentric. If you haven’t had massive success, can’t pay people and you engage in crazy (but mostly harmless) behavior, people won’t work for you and they’ll simply call you crazy. Some otherwise intelligent people have gotten off track because they mix up two separate things: wealth and eccentricity. They forget one of my golden rules: “Correlation doesn’t equal causation.” Just because one person is rich and crazy doesn’t mean acting crazy will make you rich. **Tagline: “Hey! Look at me! I’m crazy! Crazy as loon, I tell ya!”** 6) *Das Kommandant*Otherwise known as the “devotee of the 1950s school of dictatorial management,” these are people (typically executives or managers) who think so highly of themselves that they actually think they are gods. They seem to believe employees merely exist to serve them. Even worse, they actually think that grown adults like to be taken to task in front of others. These creeps have no idea how to truly motivate intelligent adults. More than a decade ago (while I was finishing my M.B.A.), I wrote a thesis paper that utilized the research of [Geert Hofstede](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geert_Hofstede). Hofstede identified various cultural differences between the U.S., Western Europe and Asia (including “power distance,” which is germane to this section). Essentially, power distance is how employees think of their bosses. In many Asian cultures, the boss is revered as an all-knowing, all-powerful being. The boss is a near deity. As such, the power distance in Asia is very large. In the U.S. and Europe, employees might have respect for the boss, but they consider the boss to be merely a person rather than a god. The power distance in the U.S. is very small. *Das Kommandant* doesn’t seem to realize that his tyrannical rants, dress downs, put downs and hissy fits have the opposite effect on people. *Das Kommandant* will drive away the talented and intelligent and will soon have a domain of only mice. **Tagline: “Who’s the boss?! Me! Me! Me! I am! Don’t forget that, moron!”** 7) The MouseThe Mouse comes and goes and no one notices. The Mouse takes a two-week vacation and no one realized. The Mouse makes a suggestion but no one hears. The Mouse obviously is the person without a backbone who’s afraid to stick up for him or herself and is afraid of saying anything that might cause trouble. Ironically, the Mouse often ends up working for *Das Kommandant*. They form a weirdly symbiotic and co-dependent relationship that usually travels down the path of stupidity with *Das Kommandant* thinking everything is smooth sailing because no one is voicing any discontent. Meanwhile, The Mouse is too afraid to point out any possible problems. **Tagline (from someone else): “Oh, you still work here?”** A Mix of MadnessWorse than dealing with people who have one of these personality types is dealing with someone who has ordered the combination platter. *Das Kommandant* may be bad, but when you combine it with Daffy the Visionary, look out! While Mt. Eruption is a terrifying thing to deal with, imagine the horrors of discovering someone who you thought was a Mouse actually has a Mt. Eruption personality, too. We’ve all probably dealt with these types of people in our careers. Perhaps some of us possess some of these traits. If anyone has any funny or interesting stories about personality types of if you have other examples of personality types, please do let me know. **Fire away!** *Bill Snow is an experienced entrepreneur, executive, networker, writer and raconteur. He can be contacted at* *bill@billsnow.com**.*[**Click here for Snow’s full biography.**](http://www.eprairie.com/aboutcolumnists.asp#snow)  |

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