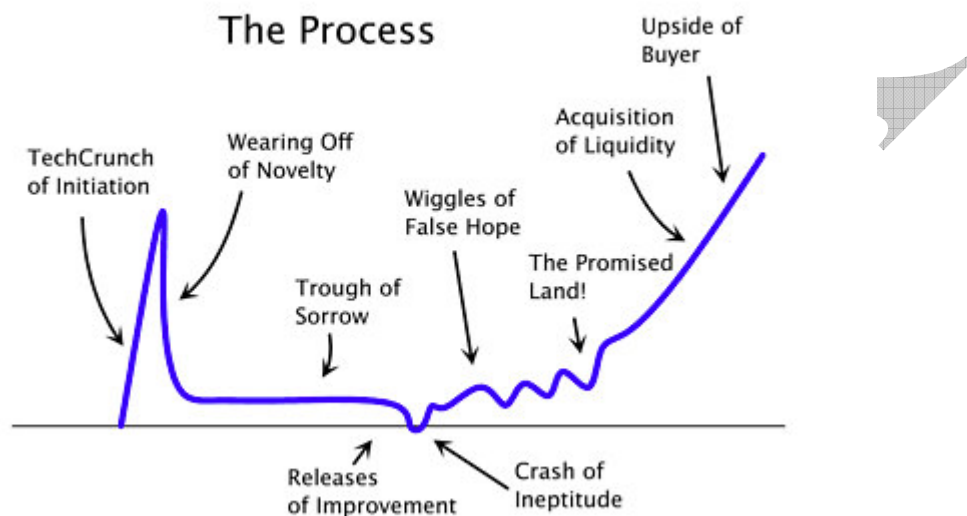


The Startup Curve

The various phases of [Paul Graham's startup curve](#):

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Many people think startups are up and to the right all the time. But more services exhibit this "startup curve" than any other growth pattern. Of course, some never get past the trough of sorrow. But many do. Mostly by staying focused on the problem they are trying to solve and working diligently to get to the promised land.

The writer had lunch with an entrepreneur who he has been working with for two decades now. On his most recent project, it took him years to get to the promised land. But he is there now, usage is scaling, customers are renewing, and the business is finally making money. It was great to see that and he was justifiably proud of the accomplishment.

It turns out, like most success stories, the answer was simplifying the service. Taking features out. Reducing the value proposition to a clear and simple use case. This was not done in a vacuum. This was done by releasing a less than perfect product to the market, finding a few customers who wanted a less than perfect product, and then listening carefully to those customers to get to the ideal product.

This is why you must go through the roller coaster ride. The wearing off phase is scary. The trough of sorrow is horrible. The crash of ineptitude is a near death experience. But without all of them, you can't get feedback, you can't learn what is just hype, and what is reality.

So to all those entrepreneurs whittling away in their offices trying to find out when to release their product to the market, I say "get on with it". You are going to have to go on the roller coaster ride at some point. Might as well start now.

Paul Graham is one of the founders of Y Combinator.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article are the personal thoughts of the author and may not reflect the views of WMJ Kelleher & Associates.

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