By Jeff Haden |  Jan 10, 2012 |  Inc.com

Joe Hill never planned to be an entrepreneur. But once he stumbled upon a great iPad app idea for his kids, he didn't look back.



*Courtesy of Autism Light*

**Joe Hill was told to find a market** so he did—but not in the way he originally intended.

In 2010 Hill lost his job with a biotech firm, so he took what he  calls "the first job available" as a financial planner.  "My new boss  told me to find a market to focus on," he says, "and since my two sons  were diagnosed with autism, I decided the market I really understood was  parents of kids with special needs."

After a presentation one potential client said, "I really appreciate  you talking to me about financial planning, but what I really need are  affordable tools that can help my autistic son learn." Specialized  equipment costs thousands of dollars, and software runs $300 or more.

"Her comment really struck a chord," Hill says. "My boys loved Angry  Birds. They like touching objects on the TV to try and make them move,  too. I knew if they could tap on words or pictures and hear them, they  could learn more easily. Plus they wouldn't stop playing with my iPhone until the battery ran out, so I knew there was something there,  especially since autistic kids typically won't sit still for long."

He set out to develop an application that could make learning words simple and fun, and in November launched  Aeir Talk ,  a $19.99 iPad app that lets parents create an unlimited amount of cards  customized with personally recorded voices and pictures they take.

So what did Hill, a first-time entrepreneur, learn about starting a business?

**If your idea doesn't provide long-term benefits, you need a new idea.** Everyone downloads what seem like cool apps they only end up using for a  day. Hill changed his product a number of times during the development  stage to avoid that. For example, the decision to make the app fully  customizable was especially tough to make, but he realized that if a kid  sees his mom's picture he expects to hear his mom's voice. Hill did  what was necessary to ensure the app has lasting value, allowing parents  and kids to really make it their own. The development cycle would  absolutely have been a lot faster and a lot less expensive, but the app  would also have been far less beneficial.

**Think about solving broader problems.** Children with special  needs don't just speak English and live in the U.S. Hill made the app  language independent so if a parent wants her child to learn Spanish  they simply record Spanish words. The app doesn't care. In the end Hill  built an app to help kids with special needs, but it can help any child  learn. Definitely focus on a specific audience, says Hill, but never  stop thinking about broader applications and markets for your product.

**Always look for serendipitous relationships.** Hill pitched his  idea to everyone. Most people loved it but no one wanted to become an  investor. Then he talked to Zack Miller at
 We Are Titans
,  a product development and consulting firm, and we struck an equity  deal. Not only are they great developers but Miller is also great at  making contacts and leveraging relationships. Good teams are made up of  people who are different. Be open and don't look in the normal places for partners.

**You don't know what you don't know, and that's okay.** If you  need help, the best thing you can say to someone is, "I don't know what  I'm doing. Can you help me?" People naturally like to help people. Be  honest, be humble, and ask for help. When you're willing to admit you  don't have all the answers, people respond.

**No matter what you're doing, never be ashamed of it.** Hill took a job in the morning scrubbing warehouse floors and another at night carrying bags and scrubbing floors at a hotel. (He wanted jobs that allowed flexible hours so he could start his company.) Every chance he got he told people about what he was doing. Many had relatives with kids with needs. Do whatever you have to do to keep rolling, and never be ashamed of what you do. The end justifies the humble means.

Source: http://www.inc.com/jeff-haden/how-an-accidental-entrepreneur-found-a-big-idea.html