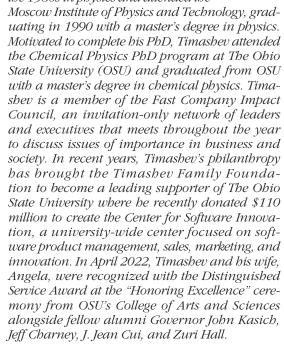# The World of Entrepreneurship

An Interview with Ratmir Timashev, Founder, Veeam Software

EDITORS' NOTE *Ratmir Timashev (ratmirtimashev.com) is a globally recognized entrepreneur, technologist, and philanthropist. He is the founder of Veeam Software – a global leader in cloud data protection and management software, headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, as well as the Kubeshop software incubator. Timashev was born in 1966 in the city of Ufa, the capital of the Bashkortostan region in Russia. He decided to pursue higher education studies in the 1980s in physics and attended the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, graduating in 1990 with a master's degree in physics. Motivated to complete his PhD, Timashev attended the Chemical Physics PhD program at The Ohio State University (OSU) and graduated from OSU with a master's degree in chemical physics. Timashev is a member of the Fast Company Impact Council, an invitation-only network of leaders and executives that meets throughout the year to discuss issues of importance in business and society. In recent years, Timashev's philanthropy has brought the Timashev Family Foundation to become a leading supporter of The Ohio State University where he recently donated $110 million to create the Center for Software Innovation, a university-wide center focused on software product management, sales, marketing, and innovation. In April 2022, Timashev and his wife, Angela, were recognized with the Distinguished Service Award at the "Honoring Excellence" ceremony from OSU's College of Arts and Sciences alongside fellow alumni Governor John Kasich, Jeff Charney, J. Jean Cui, and Zuri Hall.*

Ratmir Timashev

You came to the United States to study chemical physics at Ohio State and were well on your way towards receiving a PhD, before pivoting to entrepreneurship. What inspired this decision?

When I arrived in the United States to study at OSU, a new world of opportunity had been opened to me – well beyond the chemical physics and non-linear optical science that I was studying. This was the era of the dotcom boom, and while my studies were going well, the internet was calling.

In my earlier years, I was encouraged to center my education around STEM. My parents were both engineers, and I had a natural aptitude for it. As my early career unfolded though, I began to see how the same problem-solving and experimenting skills I had been honing in on in the lab could be applied in the worlds of business and tech. Creating products and solutions for customers quickly became my hobby, and eventually my life's work. It couldn't have been possible without the early support I received from friends, family, and my many mentors at The Ohio State University.

What were the keys to your success as an entrepreneur in the early years of the internet?

I always like to say, my entrepreneurial success has been a matter of "right time, right place, brilliant product." The stars aligned perfectly when I arrived at OSU in 1992. It was obvious that the onset of the digital age was approaching and would transform the world as we knew it. My hard work and determination to be a part of those changes helped shape these early chapters.

While many didn't think of Columbus, Ohio in the 1990s to be the ideal place to launch a career in tech, it was the perfect setting for me – both professionally and personally. The community is diverse, welcoming, and located in the heart of the United States where you can access nearly every major population center in the country. All this combined to make me feel not only welcomed into the American way of life, but also empowered to be part of its story and future growth.

Most importantly for any entrepreneur, my team and support network helped make it all possible. My business partner and friend is Andrei Baronov, who I believe is one of the most brilliant engineers and technology visionaries of our time. With my background in go-to-market (GTM) sales and marketing strategy, our complementary skill sets fueled our compatibility as co-founders and the execution of our visions to develop brilliant products. Challenges and obstacles undoubtedly arose in those early years, but together we harnessed our strengths and opportunities to build great products.

Do you feel that entrepreneurship can be learned, or is it a trait a person is born with?

Entrepreneurship absolutely is a skill and mindset to be learned, practiced, and mastered and, in today's environment where new industries and spaces are being defined through new tech, it's more important than ever.

Becoming an entrepreneur requires a complex set of traits – creativity, risk-taking, experimentation, problem-solving, leadership, and more. While some people may be born with certain predispositions that make them better suited for entrepreneurship than others, I strongly believe it can be developed through education, mentorship, and hands-on experience. Anyone who is willing to put in the effort and has the right mindset can learn to be an entrepreneur and form a successful business. I also make sure to always reiterate with younger generations that entrepreneurship is needed in established companies as well. We see it all the time with larger corporations struggling to adapt, and this is a key opportunity for innovative younger minds to thrive.

How did the OSU and Columbus community shape your career and eventual success?

Anyone who has stepped foot on OSU's campus knows there's something special about the community. The OSU family, and professors, like Dr. Terry Miller and Dr. George McBane, helped me feel a part of this great institution's history – and its future – from day one. It doesn't always feel like it, but it was nearly three decades ago when I first arrived with big dreams and a lot to learn about this new language and culture. The mentorship and relationships I formed played an invaluable role in my journey in business and adulthood, which continue to this day. Most importantly of all, OSU is where I met my wife, Angela, who has been my number one supporter and partner. Now whenever we make the quick trip from Connecticut, the American Midwest feels like home – and we're humbled to be in the position to pay it forward by investing in the next generation.

What inspired you to become involved in philanthropy, and how do you choose the causes and organizations that you support?

The years I spent in Columbus played a pivotal role in my life. Without my time studying at OSU, I'm not sure I would have had the courage or skill necessary to form my companies. So, it only felt natural that I'd use my success and capacity to give back to the community that shaped me into who I am. This has been the underlying idea behind our close partnership with The Ohio State University.

Angela and I, through the Timashev Family Foundation, center our philanthropic efforts around the arts, innovation, and uplifting communities in need, wherever they are in the world. For many years, we've seen the impact we can make, from establishing grants and scholarships that support underrepresented individuals in STEM, to funding initiatives that promote access to the arts and culture. We believe that by investing in these areas, we can help pave the way for a brighter and more equitable future for rising generations.

What is your vision for the Center for Software Innovation?

My hope is that the Center will play a pivotal role in transforming Columbus into a flourishing "high-tech mecca," situated right in the heartland of America. This transformation would not only drive economic development and further bolster the region's existing momentum, with notable investments from companies like Intel and Google, but it would also showcase the abundant opportunities and advantages that Ohio offers to global brands and innovators.

Software, the Center's focus, is where the most value creation is going to happen over the next 50 years. In fact, many companies today are essentially software companies. Tesla, for instance, is a software company that manufactures cars, while JPMorgan Chase is a software company that delivers banking services. By providing a comprehensive curriculum, the Center will equip OSU students with essential hard and soft skills, empowering them to establish similarly successful software companies in the future.

The Center for Software Innovation, developed with Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business and College of Engineering, is just now getting started and is soon welcoming its first cohort of students this Fall. Students will be immersed in an integrated curriculum that leverages industry experiences and hands-on learning, with a focus on the hottest trends in tech – AI, blockchain, cloud computing, cybersecurity, AR and VR, and 3D printing.

For the community, we plan to host conferences and events to not only highlight the talent we already have in Ohio, but also bring in leading voices in technology and innovation from elsewhere. And for budding entrepreneurs, both student and non-student, we are planning to launch a software startup accelerator that will ensure the next great innovations are founded right here in Ohio. Together, we aim to create a positive cycle where the Center is empowering brilliant ideas and leaders across software product development, sales, and marketing – and providing them with the opportunities to succeed in the industry, contribute back into the Columbus ecosystem, and help build a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for the Midwest.

What advice would you give to young people who are just starting their careers, particularly those interested in entrepreneurship?

In the world of entrepreneurship, focus on satisfying a critical need in the market – a real problem for a real customer. Too often, innovators get caught up in the excitement of building the latest new thing, without really thinking about who their target customer is or what problem they're trying to solve. By focusing on a specific problem and a specific customer, entrepreneurs can create a product or service that truly adds value to their lives and can be easily consumed or leveraged. This makes a business more likely to survive and thrive, and it provides a deeper sense of purpose and direction to help stay focused and motivated over the long term.

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This brings me back to my mantra: "right time, right place, brilliant product." It's not luck or serendipity that brings a successful business or team together – even though that helps – but rather a deep understanding of the market and a willingness to put in the hours required to build something truly valuable and unique. Equally important is believing in yourself and surrounding yourself with positive forces and team members who you can have fun with.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

The most effective leaders are those who have a compelling vision for their organizations or products, and can both convey these visions clearly and inspire others to join them. When it comes to executing on vision, effective leaders understand how to set the right priorities for an organization and rally the troops towards the same goal.

Leadership, regardless of where it comes in a hierarchy, requires the abilities to hire the right people, build a team of like-minded people who share your core values, set the goals and priorities and empower employees, and foster a sense of trust, respect, and open communication. This includes actively listening to feedback and ideas from team members and creating a culture of collaboration and innovation.

In terms of my own management style, I start with my end goal in mind: how can I build teams and empower all segments of a company to execute. I do this by prioritizing building strong relationships and taking the time to understand strengths, goals, and challenges of my colleagues. When we have a solid foundation built upon a shared set of values and vision, I strive to foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement – encouraging teams to take risks and learn from both successes and failures. By supporting them, the entire company can make a more successful product – and greatness can come from any corner.

Looking forward, what do you see as the most exciting trends or opportunities in tech, and what is your perspective on the burgeoning rise of AI?

AI is undoubtedly the most significant trend in tech, and our world as a whole. It will likely prove to be the most disruptive technology created since the onset of the internet, and I'm keen to see where its progression leads for all different industries and sectors. AI does not exist by itself. It will become part of any product and service we consume. It has the potential to revolutionize markets and solve many of our most critical global challenges that we face today. Like all other great waves of innovation throughout history, this chapter starts and ends with individual products and solutions – many of which we're already seeing deployed.

Certainly, there are legitimate concerns about the economic, ethical, and social implications of AI, from issues of bias and fairness to the potential for job displacement and the impact on privacy and security. However, these challenges are precisely why we need younger generations studying the intersection of software and other disciplines – business, philosophy, the arts, soft skills, and more.

With all that you have accomplished in your career, are you able to enjoy the process and take moments to reflect on what you have achieved?

Thankfully, yes. Each day is a chance to cherish being with family, friends, and community. Spending time with our kids going to tennis matches or visiting colleges are just a few of the weekend activities that Angela and I have been enjoying. With summer almost upon us, it's another great opportunity to remind ourselves to unplug and be present. ●