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Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future

by Ashlee Vance

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37 Highlights | 3 Notes

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 432

think there are probably too many smart people pursuing Internet stuff, finance, and law,” Musk said on the way. “That is part of the reason why we haven’t seen as much innovation.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 617

As his ex-wife, Justine, put it, “He does what he wants, and he is relentless about it. It’s Elon’s world, and the rest of us live in it.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 636

“In the comics, it always seems like they are trying to save the world. It seemed like one should try to make the world a better place because the inverse makes no sense.”

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 707

“We were left with the impression that we were capable of anything. You just have to make a decision and do it. In that sense, my father would be very proud of Elon.”

Elon

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 724

And, according to Maye, Errol spent about seven years as a relentless suitor seeking her hand in marriage and eventually breaking her will. “He just never stopped proposing,” she said. Their

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1325

Musk began thinking back to his time as an intern at the Bank of Nova Scotia. His big takeaway from that job, that bankers are rich and dumb, now had the feel of a massive opportunity.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1610

“That’s my lesson for taking a vacation: vacations will kill you.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1668

He felt as if the public had lost some of its ambition and hope for the future.

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 3306

Only a cynical dullard could come away from witnessing this feeling anything other than wonder at what man can accomplish.

ELo

Highlight (Yellow) and Note | Location 3375

“We were looking for people that had been building things since they were little.”

Eo

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3602

One of my favorite things about Elon is his ability to make enormous decisions very quickly. That is still how it works today.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3663

People who await guidance or detailed instructions languish. The same goes for workers who crave feedback.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3681

If the rules are such that you can’t make progress, then you have to fight the rules.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 3786

To make something like that vehicle happen, she said, the SpaceX employees needed to be effective and pushy. “Make sure your output is high,” Shotwell said. “If we’re throwing a bunch of shit in your way, you need to be mouthy about it.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4185

“You could see that he was a step or three ahead of everyone else and one hundred percent committed to what we were doing.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4429

absurd. Musk, though, approaches everything from a Platonic perspective.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4778

SolarCity is a key part of what can be thought of as the unified field theory of Musk. Each one of his businesses is interconnected in the short term and the long term. Tesla makes battery packs that SolarCity can then sell to end customers. SolarCity supplies Tesla's charging stations with solar panels, helping Tesla to provide free recharging to its drivers. Newly minted Model S owners regularly opt to begin living the Musk Lifestyle and outfit their homes with solar panels. Tesla and SpaceX help each other as well. They exchange knowledge around materials, manufacturing techniques, and the intricacies of operating factories that build so much stuff from the ground up.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4838

times. Once you've been through that, it stays with you for a long time. I'm not sure it ever leaves really. So, I do feel joy now, but there's still that nagging feeling that it might all go away. Even later in life when my grandmother knew there was really no possibility of her going hungry, she always had this thing about food. With Tesla, I decided to raise a huge amount of money just in case something terrible happens."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4888

Musk has decided that man's survival depends on setting up another colony on another planet and that he should dedicate his life to making this happen.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 4928

"He definitely wants to be the first man on Mars," Riley said. "I have begged him not to be." Perhaps Musk enjoys teasing his wife or maybe he's playing coy, but he denied this ambition during one of our late-night chats. "I would only be on the first trip to Mars if I was confident that SpaceX would be fine if I die," he said. "I'd like to go, but I don't have to go."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5003

"Elon's worst trait by far, in my opinion, is a complete lack of loyalty or human connection,"

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5033

Even in social settings, Musk might get up from the dinner table without a word of explanation to head outside and look at the stars, simply because he's not willing to suffer fools or small talk.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5064

When he asked me during one of our dinners if I thought he was insane, it was a test of sorts.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5101

During a lunch in Virginia, Cowen described Musk not as a genius inventor but as an attention seeker, and not a terribly good one at that. “I don’t think a lot of people care about getting to Mars,” he said. “And it seems like a very expensive way to drive whatever breakthroughs you might get from it. Then,

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5121

“The last thing a country with 50 million people on food stamps and 85 billion dollars deeper into debt every month needs is anything to do with space, especially space with more joyrides for the super rich.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5183

Why would you want to work for a defense contractor when you can work for a guy who wants to go to Mars and he’s going to move heaven and earth to make it happen? You can frame a problem in a way that’s really good for the business.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5190

“Good ideas are always crazy until they’re not.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5208

Page talked about Musk at times as if he were a one-of-a-kind, a force of nature able to accomplish things in the business world that others would never even try.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5215

Page holds Musk up as a model he wishes others would emulate—a figure that should be replicated during a time in which the businessmen and politicians have fixated on short-term, inconsequential goals. “I don’t think we’re doing a good job as a society deciding what things are really important to do,” Page said. “I think like we’re just not educating people in this kind of general way. You should have a pretty broad engineering and scientific background. You should have some leadership training and a bit of MBA training or knowledge of how to run things, organize stuff, and raise money. I don’t think most people are doing that, and it’s a big problem. Engineers are usually trained in a very fixed area. When you’re able to think about all of these disciplines together, you kind of think differently and can dream of much crazier things and how they might work. I think that’s really an important thing for the world. That’s how we make progress.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5226

“Elon came to the conclusion early in his career that life is short,” Straubel said. “If you really embrace this, it leaves you with the obvious conclusion that you should be working as hard as you can.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5235

It bothers Musk a bit that his kids won't suffer like he did. He feels that the suffering helped to make him who he is and gave him extra reserves of strength and will.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5243

Musk has talked about having more kids, and it's on this subject that he delivers some controversial philosophizing vis-à-vis the creator of Beavis and Butt-head. "There's this point that Mike Judge makes in Idiocracy, which is like smart people, you know, should at least sustain their numbers," Musk said. "Like, if it's a negative Darwinian vector, then obviously that's not a good thing. It should be at least neutral."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5268

By the time our last dinner had come around, I had decided that this propensity for risk had little to do with Musk being insane, as he had wondered aloud several months earlier. No, Musk just seems to possess a level of conviction that is so intense and exceptional as to be off-putting to some. As we shared some chips and guacamole and cocktails, I asked Musk directly just how much he was willing to put on the line. His response? Everything that other people hold dear. "I would like to die on Mars," he said. "Just not on impact. Ideally I'd like to go for a visit, come back for a while, and then go there when I'm like seventy or something and then just stay there. If things turn out well, that would be the case. If

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5310

It seems that he's become almost addicted to expanding his ambitions and can't quite stop himself from announcing things like the Hyperloop and the space Internet. I'm also more convinced than ever that Musk is a deeply emotional person who suffers and rejoices in an epic fashion. This side of him is likely obscured by the fact that he feels most deeply about his own humanity-altering quest and so has trouble recognizing the strong emotions of those around him. This tends to make Musk come off as aloof and hard. I would argue, however, that his brand of empathy is unique. He seems to feel for the human species as a whole without always wanting to consider the wants and needs of individuals. And it may well be the case that this is exactly the type of person it takes to make a freaking space Internet real.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5461

This causes people to be distracted by the manic-depressive nature of the stock instead of creating great products.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5470

For those who are under the impression that they are so clever that they can outsmart public market investors and would sell SpaceX stock at the "right time," let me relieve you of any such notion. If you really are better than most hedge fund managers, then there is no need to worry about the value of your SpaceX stock, as you can just invest in other public company stocks and make billions of dollars in the market.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 5530

The thing that keeps you going is that a few people do say yes and then a few more, and—interview
