

## **“How Elon Musk’s Model 3 Tesla Motivated Me to Write a Series of Children's Books”**

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June 2019

*Disclaimer: This article is not about technologies, rockets, or electric cars. This article is about Elon Musk and how his story might ignite a spark in you to do something you may never think was possible. I have followed Mr. Musk through part of his career and his successes have illuminated a clear pattern for me. This article is intended to lift the veil, just a wee bit, to bring these patterns to light. My hope for you is a personal revelation about how these principles work no matter where they are applied. If you know nothing and/or a little about PayPal, SpaceX, Tesla, or Elon Musk, all the better.*

I started following Elon Musk’s career in 2001 when I saw what he was trying to do with PayPal. Having ridden a small lucrative Internet wave myself and struggled with accepting money online, I knew the potential was exponential and a game-changer, kind of like the Internet (#AlGore). Paypal intensely disrupted traditional banking, even online banking. Elon Musk also disrupted business as usual and the powers that be did not like that either. A year later eBay bought PayPal and Elon Musk received \$165 million for his troubles. Not bad for a year’s worth of work — who could not live on \$452,054.80 per day give or take a few thousand?

Then like a little dreamy kid, Elon Musk set his efforts on space! Personally, I spent so many nights thinking about space and imagining how I could build my own rocket, like Apollo 11, but better, faster, and safer. However, I was only dreaming and Elon Musk was not imagining or dreaming anything! In 2002, Elon Musk saw something that could be done better and set out to do it with SpaceX! The media thought he was a crazy billionaire run amok, but those who knew him knew differently. To date, he has arguably surpassed what NASA, and I love NASA — just saying, could not do in the last 40 years. In 2018, SpaceX successfully launched the Falcon Heavy, the most powerful rocket in operation as of 2018. On the first test mission, Elon Musk transported one of his Tesla Roadsters as a dummy payload and launched it into space.

As if building the world’s best rocket wasn’t enough, concurrently, Elon Musk also had his sights on an electric car start-up company, Tesla Motors, Inc. Ah, the perfect dichotomy, design and build the world’s biggest rockets and the world’s fastest cars,

which just happen to be fully electric during the same time period — a net carbon balance of inventions perhaps. In February 2004, Elon Musk became chairman of the board and basically took over Tesla overseeing the details of the production of the Tesla Roadster. Why? The media and the car industry all said he could not build and deliver a production fully electric car to the market and certainly not an electric car that could compete for speed with the big boys. Elon Musk did it! In 2006, the Tesla Roadster received 1st place in the San Francisco International Auto Show. In 2008, Tesla delivered 2500 Tesla Roadsters to the market in 31 different countries. The first Tesla went 0-60mph in 3.7 seconds and had a 200-mile range on a single charge with a base price of \$99,000.

The media and the auto industry thought this was a fluke. “Big oil” was just beginning to boil, no pun intended. I mean really, how many “prototype” cars or “concept” cars do we see that never make it to the market? Concept and prototype cars come and go from Auto Shows, but Tesla was there to stay.

Of course, with success comes a raft of critics and naysayers which can motivate you if you understand the “why” behind the “what”. Media companies, whatever the form, care about one thing, selling media. Unfortunately, negative media sells more because negative people like to read negative things about other people (truth or lies) and genuinely take pleasure in others’ failures. My theory is that those types of people out there can’t wait for you to fail because then they have an excuse to never try anything. When I was a kid growing up I had a poster in my room with a wave at the legendary surf spot Mavericks and one lone surfer, surfing the middle of the wave. At the bottom of the poster, the sentence read, “Success consists of getting up one more time than you fall.” That resonated with me as a child just as it does today. As an engineer, we understand that failures are the only path to success. It is so sad that failure is deemed “bad” in traditional schooling rather than failure being a learning tool of what not to do next time. I am convinced this gross miscalculation in teaching is why students cannot problem solve or think for themselves today much less be prepared for the workforce.

I am not sure Elon Musk ever wanted to build anything more than the Tesla Roadster. But what I do know, is that the media and naysayers immediately said he could not build a sedan that was all-electric and get that to the market in a price range to compete with the big boys. Again, they told him it could not be done — see the pattern here? He defied the odds again. In June of 2012, Tesla introduced the Model S. The Model S was a 5-door liftback car. The Model S can seat up to seven(7) passengers, and then had a range of 265 miles and traveled 0-60 mph in 4.3 seconds with a based price of \$65,000 (I do not believe they sold any base price models). The Tesla Model S was the

top-selling plug-in electric car worldwide in 2015 and 2016. By September 2018, Tesla delivered over 250,000 Model S around the world.

And the naysayers continued. The critics told him he could not make an SUV and then he blew the world away. The Model X was introduced in February 2012: Seats up to 8, range of 330 miles on a charge, 0-60 mph in 2.9 seconds with a base price of \$75,000. The “Falcon” second-row up swinging door is an engineering marvel. If you have not seen the Model X in action, you should go online and look. By September 2018, over 100,000 had been sold worldwide.

Now, I will agree that up to this point in the Tesla lineup, Tesla was a luxury. The hybrid cars, not fast or cool looking, were getting between 40-50 mph already and were priced in the \$30k range. The cost differential could not justify buying a fully electric car so you could save fuel cost. The introduction of the base Model 3 changed that forever.

You would think we would all get the pattern by now. When Elon Musk puts his mind to something and says he is going to do it, he is eventually, somehow, someway, going to make it happen. Coincidentally, there was a poster in one of my offices that my staff bought for me of a guy climbing/hanging high on the side of a rocky mountain with a pulley system bringing up his mountain bike in tow. At the bottom of the picture, the words simply stated, “Make it Happen.” I believe this code is embedded in Elon Musk’s DNA and others like him.

In September 2015, Tesla announced that the Model 3 would be unveiled in March 2016. In October of 2016, I put a \$1000 refundable deposit down on the base Model 3 priced at \$35,000. Even I was dubious about actually taking delivery of a fully electric car that would seat five, traveled 220 miles on a charge and did 0-60 mph in 3.2 seconds. The Model 3 was followed by numerous, to be expected, setbacks and a plethora of negative media, speculation, and doubt and even rumors of Tesla closing down. In February 2019, I received a text from Tesla that I could log in to my Tesla account and order my Model 3. I was in shock. I logged into my account and sure enough, just like Elon Musk promised, there was a base Model 3 for me to order in black with stock gray rims at a price tag of \$35,000. I opted to upgrade my rims to 19” sport wheels for \$1500 and upgrade to Autopilot for \$6000 so my total cost was \$42,500. During the final inspection, they found a part that needed to be replaced and had to order it from California. So, I had to reschedule my delivery date to work with our schedules. On April 23, 2019, I surprised my wife, and our new 4-week old baby, with the black Model 3 Tesla. She named it Tony (after Iron Man). And, yes, of course, the first song we listened to in the Tesla was “Back in Black” by AC/DC. All the financing documents and trade-in was done online, and all we had to do when we got to the Tesla

dealer, was sign a few forms. It was the best car buying experience ever! It took ten minutes to complete the car purchase. I do not know how it could be done better than that. However, if someone challenged Elon Musk to do it faster, I am sure he could!

In February 2019, the Model 3 became the all-time best-selling plug-in electric car in the U.S. By March 2019, they were close to delivering over 200,000 Model 3's. In July of 2019, it was dubbed the safest car in Europe. And driving it off the Tesla lot...well it was a surreal experience. I would compare it to seeing the Sistine Chapel for the first time. You are in awe of the art and engineering of how it was done all in the same thought. Wow does not describe it.

By now, I hope you see the pattern. It is not necessarily just about the product. It's about Elon Musk and how his determination, his iron will, his perseverance in the midst of trials, his vision for what could be, and his downright grit to get things done motivated me to write a series of children's books.

On the surface, when Elon Musk said he had an idea to do what the four biggest car manufactures in the world (Toyota, VW, Hyundai, and GM) wouldn't or couldn't do, or had an idea better than what NASA could do, most would say that's "lofty" idea to be cordial or an "insanely stupid" idea to be frank. However, for Elon Musk and other successful people who are changing our world, it's what's below the surface that counts. This is one of the reasons I have never been a fan of motivational speakers per se. I think they speak to our surface person and probably is why those that participate in those activities have to return to the motivational well so often. The pseudoscience supports the counter: it's the person down deep, or the "grit" inside us, that really determines if we can, "Make it Happen!". To learn more about grit, check out Angela Lee Duckworth's Ted Talk, "Grit: the power and passion of perseverance."

What ideas have you had stirring around in your head? Dig down and find your grit. Start the ball(s) rolling and don't stop, no matter what! Let those who tell you, you can't do it, or it's a "lofty" idea that motivates you even more to, "Make it Happen!". The human will is so powerful, it cannot be measured. It is in all our DNA to make things happen. The lack of money should not be a factor to start any good idea. If you don't believe me, go listen to the series of NPR's podcast called "How I Built This" with Guy Raz, and you will be a believer. Of course, money is "a" factor, but it is not "the" factor.

Oh yeah, I always wanted to write a series of children's books to assist parents to help their children learn to read and to bond with them around learning and reading. The books I read to my older children, in general, were not very good at doing both. And not very good at carrying on the conversation beyond the pages of the book. As an

engineer, I knew I could apply the principle of 'beginning with the end in mind' to a series of children's books. My motivation is what I call the "Elon Musk Principle": If you can build/create something better than what is already out there, "Make it Happen!".

And so with those two principles in mind, I am making it happen (with a lot, I mean a lot of help from several awesome people!). I am writing children's books.

That is my story and maybe someday I can personally thank Elon Musk for inspiring an educator and fellow engineer and entrepreneur to write a series of children's books.

"You see things; and you say, "Why?" But I dream of things that never were;  
and I say, "Why not?" —George Bernard Shaw