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## Mr. José Jacques Gustave, the Global Entrepreneur!

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Mr. José Jacques Gustave (G2J) is the first entrepreneur I had the pleasure of interviewing. I say pleasure, it was more than that. We come from the same corner of the globe: the Caribbean. Needless to say, listening to him reminded me of my past, I sometimes had the scent in my nostrils and the taste in my mouth.

In fact, when it comes to travel, with G2J, I will take you to different destinations: the Caribbean, mainland France, the USA, Africa, Asia. In my opinion, G2J is more likely to be seen as a global entrepreneur, because his favorite terrain is the world, wherever he feels there is something to be done.

Like any story, it needs a beginning, and it starts in 1965, somewhere on an island in the Caribbean.

### **1.1. Context**

G2J comes from a modest family from Martinique. Martinique for those who do not know is one of the many French islands of the West Indies in the Caribbean Sea. He is the fourth child of a sibling group consisting of one brother and two sisters.

#### **1.1.1. Parents-warrior**

With a driving license obtained during his time in the army (military service), his father started earning his money as his brother-in-law's "apprentice", a small plantation owner who had demonstrated Caribbean customary solidarity by hiring him. He was indeed a handyman. At that time in the West Indies, there was nothing

extraordinary about hiring the youngest of the family. In short, it was an approach that we would readily describe today as a form of economic “mentoring” aimed at giving people “smaller” than ourselves the chance to earn a few pennies in exchange for a variety of services. With money in his pocket and access to credit in the West Indies, his father was able to buy his own truck. For G2J’s father, this was the beginning of an “entrepreneurial” adventure: he then became what we could call today a craftsman – a transporter. To get around these islands, you should know – and this is still true today – that there were only roads. G2J’s father answered – is there a need? I guess so. Goods, such as bananas, needed people to get them from one point to another. Note that his father was an innovator, because he was the first to have the idea of transporting racing skiffs from one side of the island to the other via his truck, as it is recounted in Mr. Castandet’s book on the history of skiffs in Martinique. G2J lost his father at the age of 9. May he rest in peace, and if it is true that there is something beyond, then no doubt he will meet mine.

As for G2J’s mother, orphaned at 14, she trained to become a teacher. She passed on the knowledge she had acquired to the children. From G2J, I got a lot less detail about his mother’s life. I think I noticed this phrase more than once: “*My mother was a fighter!*”. I deliberately didn’t dig any further. The place of women in some cultures is important. It is not only her vocation to give birth to children and to be the “wife”. It is above all she who takes on a statutory role in the home, who educates, disciplines or not, keeps accounts. In short, whether you are a husband or a child, it is in your best interest to make an ally out of her, otherwise you will no longer have the affection you have longed for.

As I was listening to G2J, I realized that a singularity was emerging. The parental couple as such. Imagine that you want to build a house, it collapses a few days before it is finished. G2J told me that rather than attacking the craftsmen, her parents simply decided to rebuild it without asking more questions than that. This seemed very strange to me, because we could have imagined this couple in a process that would have consisted at least in implementing actions against the craftsman, while rebuilding. In retrospect, is it any wonder? For months, you watched your house rise up out of the ground. A certain sympathy has inevitably developed with your craftsman. I imagine that the failure of the project (the collapse of the house) becomes a collective failure because you took part in this construction. You assume the result. It is only long after I understood this philosophy that characterizes G2J: never get lost in useless fights and take the events upon yourself as soon as you have taken part in them.

You’re not born with a philosophy of life. It’s being constructed. I wanted to know how G2J was constructed and of course, if it passes through the family home, it also passes through social relationships. For a child, school is a melting pot of

social relationships. From that point of view, it seems today that G2J has not had any luck.... But it has nothing to do with luck.

### **1.1.2. Difficult school years**

G2J's school years were not easy. It seems today that he was a very industrious child. "*School was a pain for me!*". It took him six years to complete his studies from 9th grade (aged 14) to 11th grade (aged 16), taking each class twice. This gives you an idea of G2J's ordeal as a child. As a child, you must want to be and be recognized. Your grades, teacher ratings are just a few of the many ways you can be proud of yourself. But for G2J, the journeys marked out were just an antithesis of his deepest sense of self.

School predestines us, based on grades, to allow ourselves to do things or not to do things, or at least to believe that we can or cannot do them. Imagine that from the 6th grade (aged 11), a whole educational system is there to tell you in substance that you won't make it to the 9th grade (aged 14) and that if by chance you make it, receiving the BAC diploma, you shouldn't dream. An ordeal that is likely to break a young spirit and ruin his life. G2J was telling me that someone he knew talked about school as "*learned helplessness*". How to give a child the intimate conviction of being useful or useless, or even to comfort or panic him about his own future, and this on a completely simplistic basis: his grades.

This was G2J's fate: "*I had my bag on my back without knowing where to find it*". This picture is very beautiful. He had in a well-defined object (his backpack) the knowledge (his books). This knowledge he carried on his back as a burden that he could not access, because it was not in front of him. He couldn't see it, but he knew it was there. He wanted it, and the young G2J was going to develop on his own in his corner the means to grasp this knowledge.

### **1.1.3. An asserted curiosity**

He already went beyond that, with his hands, he dismantled and reassembled electronic tools. At the time, many radios could already be picked up in the islands. Listening to one of them meant that G2J could listen to all of them. So he tinkered and found a way to get radios from all over the world. While he didn't like to read, the radios were there. He "ate" all kinds of information to the point where he didn't sleep much. Thus, G2J became aware not only that he could create his own *modus operandi* to move forward in life but also that because his *modus operandi* was convincing, he too could have a certain self-esteem ... despite the opinions of educators.

Maybe he didn't understand what the teachers were saying. But he was able to invent his own method of learning and adapting to his environment. Discreetly, if he had good ideas, he would not talk about them because he thought they would not be taken seriously. How could having such poor grades add value to classroom exchanges? What's the point of trying to answer questions from teachers for whom everything is conditioned in advance and who put you in a box.... G2J wasn't trying to shine, but was looking within himself for the resources to act in this strange world far too marked out for his inventive and visionary spirit. Was G2J already a child entrepreneur? I can't say. One thing is certain: he already possessed all the attributes, a bit like a spark that only asks to meet a situation that would ignite the flame.

## **1.2. The little voice inside**

G2J is someone who doesn't ask unnecessary questions and goes for the simplest, most concrete. He constantly analyzes what his losses may be and whether they are acceptable. From my understanding, several events seem to me to be structuring to explain that this prudent daredevil has come true and is still being realized every day.

### **1.2.1. The journey of awakening**

His mother brought him to Côte d'Ivoire when he was 12 years old. Imagine (and I didn't know it), there's a whole Caribbean community in this country. Its particularity: it was a community of entrepreneurs who saw the big picture. This community conceived of existence only to undertake and constantly push back the boundaries of the impossible. G2J lived within this community and developed the taste, the desire to do, to see things in a big way. This was a very special moment in G2J's journey from my point of view.

I can well imagine the paradox of the child and his questions. He was always told he wouldn't make it. He had had to endure, as we can imagine, at least reproaches from his teachers, and at worst mockery from his classmates. The school world can be cruel to atypical children. Yet, with his curiosity and his capacity for work, he knew he could create. He met this community and there he discovered an environment that told him that anything was possible if he wanted to take the time. "*I saw their pineapple field. I had never seen anything as vast as the sea...*". This sentence sums up perfectly the cue that I guessed to be G2J's one.

The possible thus became what he could conceive of what he saw and he could now see as vast as the sea.... All that remains was to build! “Think outside of the box” we say today. It’s a nice marketing slogan, but let me tell you that people young and old, of all races, faiths, ... had to think outside the box for our beloved humanity to move forward. G2J is one of those, I say it because I mean it.

### **1.2.2. Reconciliation**

G2J did a BTS<sup>1</sup> Marketing Action Co. Contrary to his arduous journey through junior school, it was during this stage of his student life that G2J discovered an obvious taste for business. A BTS is not only learning, it is above all very operational, case-based learning.

This period of his life proved to be a decisive and structuring period for learning how to build a project. In his BTS Marketing Action Co, he was no longer working on the abstract, but on the concrete: searching for information, cross-checking it, analyzing it, drawing conclusions and finally building a case. Perhaps this was not obvious, as I can imagine that the teaching methods always remained somewhat conditioned. But, uh.... Never mind, G2J was more mature. He then had a base of knowledge and experience that allowed him to begin to be appreciated by teachers. G2J also helped his classmates a lot. He was older than them and I think he was probably taking a “leadership” role. He told me that, in addition to his own case studies, he was also involved in those of many of his classmates.

You can summarize the kid’s ideas, his sound and even his big ideas with a little structuring, and it’s probably the alchemy that made him, not very confident in himself, that nothing predestined him to do that, turn out to be a serial entrepreneur. His self-confidence, he drew it from doing it.

### **1.2.3. Values**

The main point is that G2J’s personality is the tidal wave that carries his action forward. G2J is not a complex man. He doesn’t care what other people think of him. It is what he builds with respect for others that is most important. He doesn’t envy others. The simplicity and spontaneity with which he told me about his journey is just extraordinary.

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<sup>1</sup> A BTS is a French advanced technician’s certificate, a *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur*.

Once he knows something is possible, then nothing discourages him and he will act. His action is always marked by many of these values which we could say are from another time, but which we would all gain from preserving within us: honesty, listening, diversity, respect, etc. Everything that many parents and the education system teach children and that life experiences often destroy. In the case of G2J, I believe he has indeed preserved all these values. Why? It is not the system that forged G2J, it is its own experiences with the system!

He has forged himself into a formidable business man, one you enjoy listening to because they always have something to share with you. The following anecdotes will give you an idea.

### **1.3. The fool with the hands full**

The title of this third section is not mine. It's G2J's own to define himself I admit I was very amused to hear him define himself this way. As I listened to him, I finally understood why such a nickname.

#### **1.3.1. A network**

First of all, let's talk about the G2J network. It renders many services by having a permanent approach of "connecting people". Of course, when you help a lot of people, there are returns when the time comes, even though there can be a lot of wastage. Far from being a calculated approach, it is rather someone who naturally has his heart on his sleeve and who sincerely does things without expecting anything from it. Doing things for people means forging and constantly growing a network of at least those who know how not to forget it when the day comes. G2J always starts by giving the "*mother's example*".

A little anecdote amused me a lot about his absolute weapon to manage his network. G2J confessed to me at the time that they were walking around with kilos of directories to make sure they could always contact the right person at the right time. For example, he told me about his trip to the USA (Florida) to start a business. He also brought his directories with him. As a child, he told me his mother locked away the phone to avoid large phone bills. Today with WhatsApp, it's easier....

G2J's awareness of his environment seems obvious to me as I listen to him talk to me about the business he does. Always actively listening and if there is something he doesn't understand, then he questions and beyond that he digs by himself by mobilizing his contacts wisely.

### **1.3.2. Convictions**

I can also tell you about the way he conducts his business. In business, three basic beliefs carry G2J. The first is to always respect his signature whatever the price: *“I was not raised with the soul of a victim, but that of a fighter”*. The second is to be an entrepreneur who builds and never a predator who destroys: *“You have to be willing to seize opportunities but never by ruining others”*. The third: to put oneself at the mercy of the project to be carried out: *“Yes, I am afraid sometimes, but I know how to control this fear to make it a strength. The joy of building is stronger”*.

He wonders about the resources at his disposal, but nothing more. He mainly looks at the business, thinks big and then optimizes. As an example, G2J shared with me the fact that one day he bought a server capable of holding a load much greater than its immediate needs. He just paid for the best and then gradually optimized his purchase. Of course, it’s reassuring enough for a client to realize that his supplier (G2J) had the capacity to do so in the short, medium and long terms.

G2J’s had some setbacks. At one time, he had no penny to his name. I was surprised to learn that, despite his more than questionable finances, he was once able to afford the “luxury” of an office a few steps from Place Vendôme. How? G2J explained his project to the owner without hiding the difficulties. Well, the landlord, a chartered accountant, thought that G2J’s business would be very profitable and would allow him to honor the rents. G2J himself had doubts. I think the transparency and sincerity of his remarks did the job. When you are in front of someone who is honest and you are honest yourself, in general, the interaction is likely to generate value for each stakeholder.

### **1.3.3. A thirst to move forward**

Probably the most surprising point for me was to realize that this serial entrepreneur (four Tech companies assembled in less than 20 years) had never actually studied Tech. G2J is not an engineer. How did he do it? Did he have partners? No, far from it. On the one hand, he’s an information overeater, he’s a self-taught techie. Every time he finds something, he takes the time to dig it out through hours and hours of hard work. *“I’m a fast learner, and once something’s learned, then I can do it”*. On the other hand, many people in his network were always there to advise him. Finally, the quality of his services made and make that it is the clients themselves who encourage him to move forward.

I would be remiss if I didn’t describe in a few words G2J’s various endeavors. His first company was named Datavoice. The purpose of this start-up was to sell

value-added services via premium-rate numbers to the many bettors in horse racing. His second company was called First Telecommunication (in the USA) and was designed to be resold at a discount price, international telecommunications minutes previously purchased wholesale in the USA. His third company was named G2J.COM. From its creation in Martinique to its subsidiaries in China and the USA, this company has symbolized the excellence of secure videoconferencing services, delivering to the closed world of major principals (all the G7 central banks in turn, Orange, EDF, Danone, etc.). He then created LabNoo Technologies (Lab Network Open Online). This is (because we are in the present), a holding company that has carried and is carrying company projects such as Meetnoo.com and minority shareholdings.

All these companies have one thing in common: data management. It's a leitmotif for G2J. He explains it by being an islander. For him, remote data management was always essential. Digital technology and its potentials have indeed freed creativity and the world from many constraints.

There is one point I wanted to save for the end of the discussion on G2J. Please note that G2J has always worked on a salary basis until G2J.COM was able to do without it. In short, the entrepreneur G2J has spent a large part of his life working as a paid employee and as an entrepreneur. You can imagine how much energy it can take. His life was, is a whole without boundaries between the private and the professional. It's just his adult life with this attention he told me for the well-being of his children. Moreover, he made the switch to the world of 100% entrepreneurship at the time he considered that this security had been achieved.

Currently G2J is in Rwanda for business and as far as I can judge ... the adventure continues!

All the best!



**I retain two essential points from Mr. José Jacques Gustave. The first is a quote: “*Ideas are worthless, what counts is execution!*”. The second point is an invitation to readers: “*There is no such thing as risk, it's a lack of imagination, so go see for yourself!*”**

**Question 1: what do you find inspiring about Mr. José Jacques Gustave's journey?**



**Figure 1.1.** *Mr. José Jacques Gustave. For a color version of the figure, see [www.iste.co.uk/latouche/innovation.zip](http://www.iste.co.uk/latouche/innovation.zip)*

