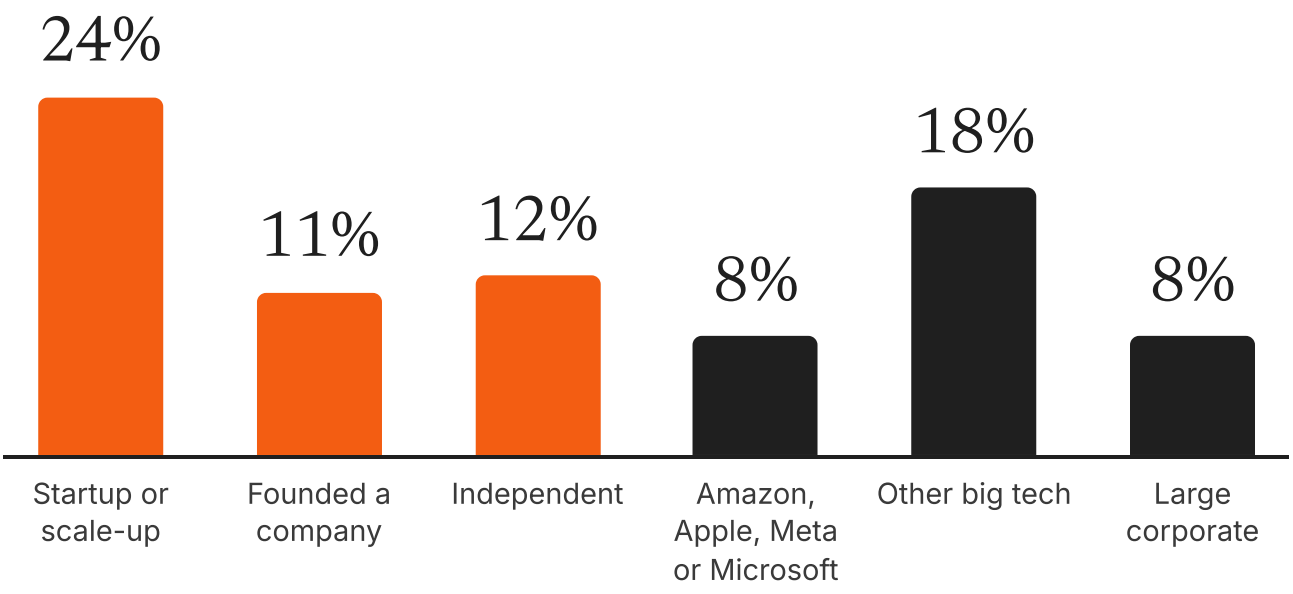
Richard Russell

What Xooglers actually do next

Where Googlers go after Google

First move after leaving Google



Not all moves are shown.

Richard Russell, November 2026



If you're at Google and wondering what's next, or you've left and wondering what's after this, you probably know three or four stories, mostly from your own team.

I spent six years at Google. Since leaving, I've started a company, been CPO of a 40-person startup and spent two years at Amazon. Now I coach people in tech working out their next move, many of them Googlers.

With the help of AI, I traced the LinkedIn careers of the 1,239 people I know who worked at Google for a year or more: 979 who have left, and 286 who are still there.

It's the people I know, not everyone at Google, and I know a lot of founders, startup leaders and people in London. So read it as what's possible, not what's likely. Here's what they did.

What stood out

Five things worth knowing

22%

Staying ten years didn't close any doors.

Of people who left after ten years or more, 22% went to a startup first, close to the 28% of those who left within three. And they went independent nearly three times as often (17% against 6%).

Half

Half went small, a third went big.

Almost half went to a startup (24%), started a company (11%) or went independent (12%). A third went to another big employer. Googlers started something of their own about one and a half times as often as the other Big Tech people I know.

62%

The bigger title came from startups.

62% of those who joined a startup came in with a bigger title than they left with. Of those who moved to Amazon, Apple, Meta or Microsoft, 21% did.

61%

What you leave as decides how you go in.

Of the directors and heads who joined a startup, 61% went in as C-level. Of those who left as individual contributors, 18% did.

3 in 4

The first move is rarely the last.

The first job after Google lasted about two and a half years, and three in four have moved again since. One in twelve went back to Google.

Working out what's next for you? Book a free 20-minute call and tell me where you are. I'll share some experiences that might help.

Book a call →

Find yourself

Find your last role at Google. "A bigger title" means a step up in title, from manager to director or director to VP, say; it reads the title, not the job, and a director at a 30-person startup isn't a director at Google.

Leadership

MDs, VPs and GMs 51 people

First move	A bigger title on the way out	Most common first titles	Today
another big tech company 24%, startup 20%, independent 18%.	**42%.**	Founder (8), then General manager or managing director (6).	24% run their own company, 22% are at a big company (including back at Google).

Other Directors and Heads of 95 people

First move	A bigger title on the way out	Most common first titles	Today
startup 22%, independent 18%, a big company outside tech 14%.	**48%.**	Director and Founder (8 each).	23% are independent, 20% run their own company.

Product

GPMs, Staff PMs, Directors and Heads of Product 27 people

First move	A bigger title on the way out	Most common first titles	Today
another big tech company 37%, startup 15%, independent 11%.	**55%.**	Founder and Director of Product (3 each).	26% run their own company, 26% are at a big company (including back at Google).

PMs (including Senior PMs) 61 people

First move	A bigger title on the way out	Most common first titles	Today
startup 28%, started a company 23%, another big tech company 18%.	**69%.**	Founder (14), then Director of Product (9).	30% run their own company, 23% are independent.

Engineering

Staff and Principal Engineers, EMs and Engineering Directors 52 people

First move
startup 35%, another big tech company 12%, started a company 10%.

A bigger title on the way out
56%.

Most common first titles
Engineer or scientist (7), then VP Engineering (6).

Today
33% are at a big company (including back at Google), 15% work at a startup.

SWEs and SREs (including Senior SWEs and SREs) 60 people

First move
startup 48%, another big tech company 12%, Amazon, Apple, Meta or Microsoft 10%.

A bigger title on the way out
25%.

Most common first titles
Engineer or scientist (27), then Engineering manager (4).

Today
33% work at a startup, 22% are at a big company (including back at Google).

Partnerships

Principals, Heads of and Directors 71 people

First move
startup 27%, another big tech company 18%, started a company 13%.

A bigger title on the way out
44%.

Most common first titles
Founder (7), then Director (6).

Today
30% are at a big company (including back at Google), 15% work at a startup.

SPMs, BD and Partner Managers 56 people

First move
started a company 25%, startup 23%, another big tech company 14%.

A bigger title on the way out
54%.

Most common first titles
Founder (14), then Director of Business development (3).

Today
27% are at a big company (including back at Google), 18% work at a startup.

gTech/PSO and similar groups in Cloud

PTM, TAM, Sales Engineer, Solutions Consultant, and associated Engineers 65 people

First move
startup 26%, another big tech company 25%, started a company 12%.

A bigger title on the way out
49%.

Most common first titles
Founder (8), then Product manager (6).

Today
28% are at a big company (including back at Google), 20% work at a startup.

Program management

TPMs and Program Managers 41 people

First move
startup 17%, Amazon, Apple, Meta or Microsoft 15%, another big tech company 12%.

A bigger title on the way out
30%.

Most common first titles
Product manager (4), then Manager (3).

Today
27% are at a big company (including back at Google), 17% work at a startup.

Marketing

Heads of, Directors and senior managers 24 people

First move
startup 21%, another big tech company 21%, independent 17%.

A bigger title on the way out
58%.

Most common first titles
CMO (5), then Director of Marketing (3).

Today
29% work at a startup, 17% run their own company.

PMMs and Marketing Managers 29 people

First move
startup 21%, another big tech company 14%, started a company 14%.

A bigger title on the way out
65%.

Most common first titles
Founder (4), then Director of Marketing (3).

Today
24% run their own company, 21% work at a startup.

Ads sales

Team Leads, Industry Heads, Heads of and Directors 36 people

First move
another big tech company 22%, startup 22%, started a company 17%.

A bigger title on the way out
59%.

Most common first titles
Founder (6), then Director (4).

Today
22% are independent, 22% are at a big company (including back at Google).

Account Strategists, Account Managers and Industry Managers 65 people

First move
startup 28%, started a company 12%, independent 12%.

A bigger title on the way out
48%.

Most common first titles
Founder (8), then Manager (5).

Today
23% work at a startup, 20% run their own company.

People Ops

People Ops and Staffing 45 people

First move
another big tech company 31%, startup 18%, independent 18%.

A bigger title on the way out
35%.

Most common first titles
Consultant and Investor or partner (6 each).

Today
36% are at a big company (including back at Google), 20% work at a startup.

Three stories

Each story blends two or three Googlers I've talked with, so nobody can be recognised. The names are made up; the details are theirs.

Sarah left after many years, and wishes she'd gone sooner

Sarah's first move out of Google didn't work. Decisions were slow. The basics she'd taken for granted weren't there. She was hired for what she knew, then told to do it differently. Everything moved more slowly than at Google, and the pay was lower. She missed it.

One thing got better: her time was her own.

For her next move, she asked a different question: where would she get to do her best work? If she had it to do again, she'd leave sooner.

Tom is still at Google, and planning one more change

Tom has built most of his career at Google. He could stay: the job is still there. But the work has changed around him. Things move more slowly, scope is harder to win, and the next step up always seems a couple of years away. He notices he cares less than he used to, and he worries about what happens if his scope shrinks.

Staying a long time has given him credibility, and moving every few years has never felt right to him. But he knows he can't wait forever. He's planning one more reinvention, probably outside Google, but not necessarily.

Jim left, and found it was never only about Google

Jim left expecting the move to fix how he felt about work. Some of it did. Work became much less painful, and more on his own terms.

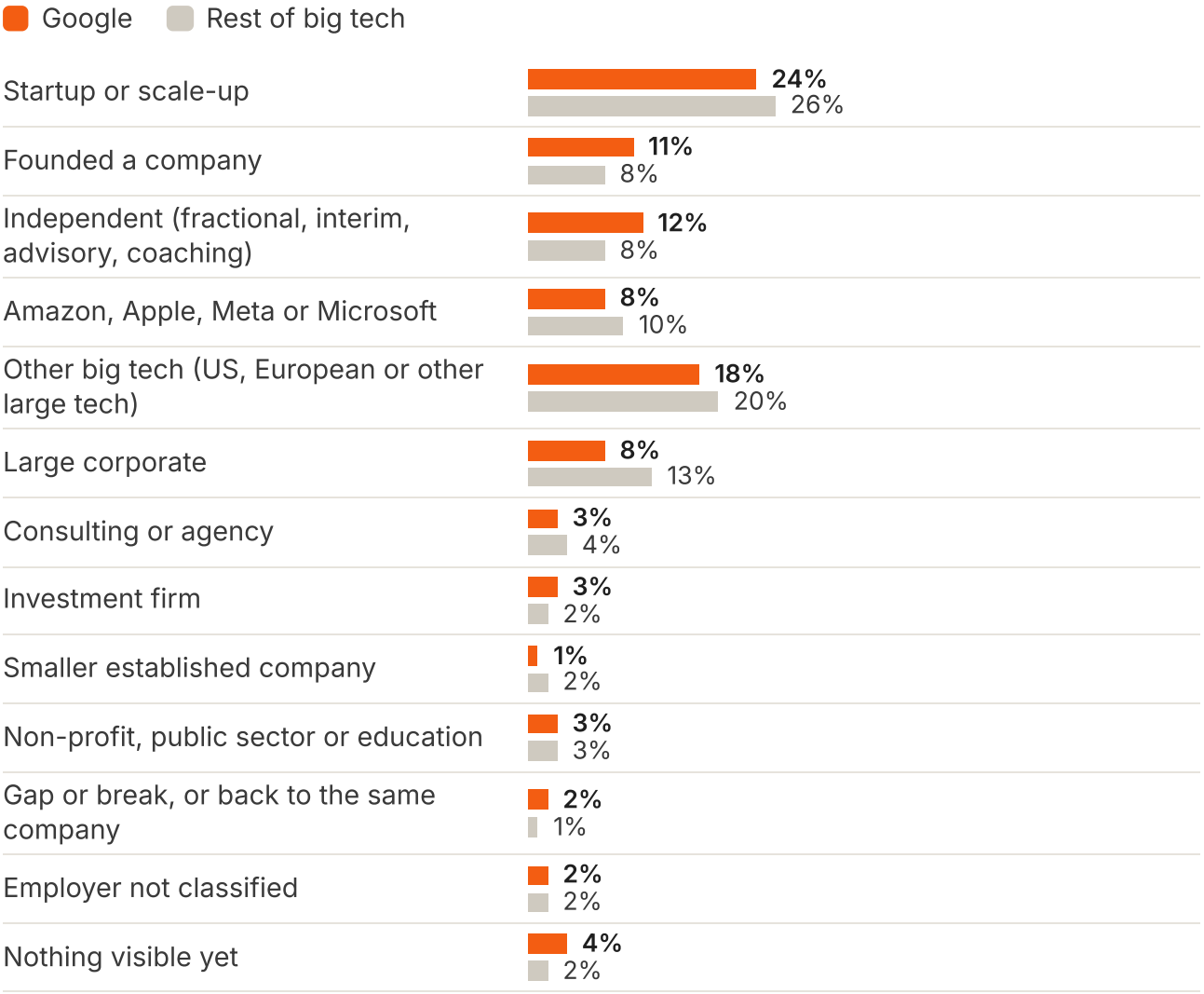
It cost him a good salary, and the status of having worked there. Outside, he found people assumed Google had been an easy ride. And some things followed him out: the feeling of playing a role, and the doubt about whether he belonged in tech at all.

Leaving fixed some things, not all of them. So his next move is about fit.

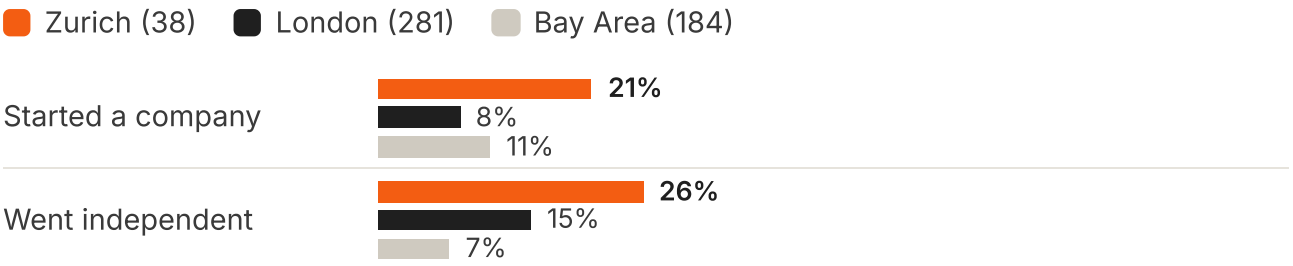
Googlers start things more than most

About one and a half times as many started a company or went independent first, compared with the other Big Tech people I know.

First move after leaving



Zurich, London and the Bay Area. The people I know who left Google in Zurich started something of their own far more often than those in London or the Bay Area (mostly Mountain View):



- **It isn't the engineers.** Engineers are about a quarter of the people I know in all three, and almost none of the Zurich founders were engineers.
- **It isn't only timing.** Most of the Zurich group left in 2016 or later, when going independent was more common everywhere. Among people who left since 2016, Zurich is still ahead on founding (about 18%, against 7% in London and 11% in the Bay Area), though London and the Bay Area catch up on independent work (19% and 13%, against 24%).
- **Today, the three cities look alike.** The share running their own company now is 13% to 17% in all three, and independent now 10% to 15%. The differences are in the first move more than where people end up.
- **It isn't how I met them.** Most of the Zurich people I know, I connected with while they were still at Google, and among those, Zurich is still ahead on founding.

Zurich is a small group, so treat it as a hint. My data can't say why.

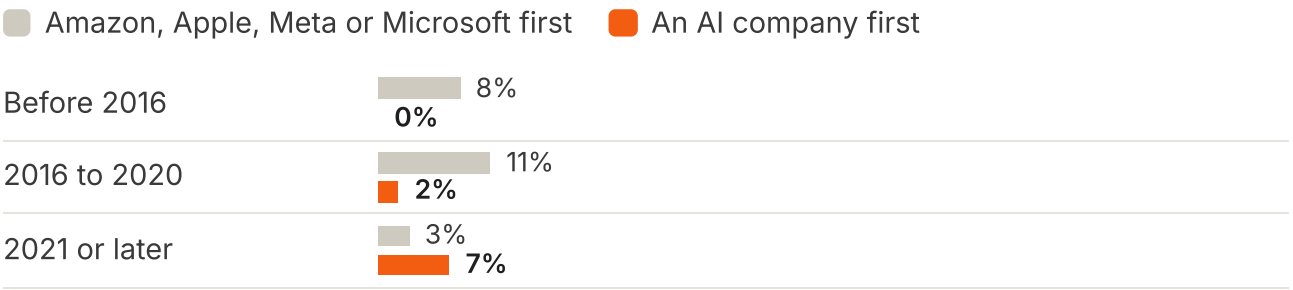
People who left in 2021 to 2023 went to startups more than anyone before them

A quarter of those who left in 2024 or later show no new job yet. Some are taking a break; some profiles aren't up to date.

	Leavers	Startup	Founded	Independent	Amazon, Apple, Meta or Microsoft	Other big tech	Large corporate	Nothing visible yet
Left by 2015	462	25%	13%	8%	8%	18%	10%	1%
Left 2016 to 2020	244	23%	9%	14%	11%	21%	7%	2%
Left 2021 to 2023	169	**31%**	11%	15%	2%	16%	6%	5%
Left 2024 or later	104	13%	12%	17%	4%	17%	2%	25%

Since 2021, more went to AI companies than to Amazon, Apple, Meta or Microsoft

Since 2021, more people went first to a company whose product is AI (19) than to one of those four (8).



- **Meta used to be the main draw.** 37 of the 75 moves to those four went to Meta, 36 of them before 2021.
- **Most AI moves weren't to the big labs.** Only 1 of the 19 went to OpenAI, Anthropic, Mistral, Cohere or xAI. The rest went to AI startups and scale-ups such as Databricks, Glean, Sierra, Wayve and Aleph Alpha. Google DeepMind counts as Google here.
- **Some of it is labels.** Few companies called themselves AI before 2016, so part of the rise is a change in labels.

Most people who went independent made it work, one way or another

Two or more years on, 39% are still independent; most of the rest moved into a job or their own company.

19% of everyone who left took six months or more before their next job. 77 went back to Google, after a median of 2.3 years away.

Staying was a career too

Those who joined by 2010 and are still there have held a median of five roles, and a third or more now hold a director or VP title.

Joined	Still there	Median roles held	Four or more roles	Moved up a seniority group	Head, director or VP now
2005 or before	41	5	68%	37%	34%
2006 to 2010	156	5	67%	47%	38%
2011 to 2015	41	4	61%	29%	24%
2016 to 2020	18	too few			
2021 or later	30	too few			

Age, gender and where people studied

I wondered whether any of this differed by age, gender or where people studied. LinkedIn lets me estimate all three: roughly how old people were when they left, their gender, and where they took their first degree. These are estimates, and they describe what people did, not what anyone can or can't do.

Age: the startup door didn't close at 40

People in their 40s joined a startup first about as often as people in their 30s (25% against 27%). What rose with age was going independent: 8% of people in their 20s, 14% in their 40s and 21% at 50 and over. Starting a company became a little less common (15% in their 20s, 8% at 50 and over).

Age when they left	People	Startup or scale-up	Started a company	Independent	Big tech or large corporate	Something else, or nothing yet
20s	172	20%	15%	8%	37%	19%
30s	411	27%	12%	10%	35%	16%
40s	305	25%	9%	14%	33%	18%
50 and over	76	16%	8%	21%	20%	36%

- **It isn't only timing.** Independent work became more common after 2016, but the pattern is the same among people who left since then (in the appendix).
- **People 50 and over joined startups less often (16%),** and more often went independent or did something else: consulting, investing, non-profit work, or nothing visible yet. It's 76 people.

Age is estimated from the year of each person's first degree, so it's wrong for anyone who studied later in life.

Did more years at Google go with starting something?

Not with starting a company. Among people 40 and over, those with five or more years at Google started a company first less often (8%) than those with fewer (17%, a small group of 53). Under 40, the two were close (14% and 12%). More years did go with going independent (16% against 9% among those 40 and over). More years usually means more stock, and a cushion would fit, but my data can't say whether money was the reason.

Gender: women joined startups less often, and went independent more

Going by first names, about 25% are likely women and 60% likely men. For the other 14%, Claude didn't want to guess. Names can mislead, so treat these as estimates.

Women joined a startup first a little over half as often as men (16% against 28%), and went independent a little more often (15% against 11%). The gap was about the same in engineering and product as in sales and partnerships.

	People	Startup or scale-up	Started a company	Independent	Big tech or large corporate	Something else, or nothing yet
Women	246	16%	9%	15%	36%	25%
Men	592	28%	13%	11%	32%	17%

My data can't say why.

Where people studied: those who studied in one country and worked in another started more companies

This uses the country of each person's first degree, which isn't the same as nationality. Of people who studied in a different country from the one they worked in at Google, 14% started a company first, against 8% of those who studied where they worked. They went independent a little less often (9% against 13%).

In London the difference is starkest. People who studied elsewhere in Europe started companies far more often than those who studied in the UK, who went independent more. It's 43 people, so treat it as a hint.

	People	Startup or scale-up	Started a company	Independent	Big tech or large corporate	Something else, or nothing yet
Studied in the UK	105	23%	3%	22%	34%	18%
Studied elsewhere in Europe	43	19%	23%	9%	35%	14%
Studied in the US or Canada	26	42%	4%	8%	31%	15%

My data can't say why. The groups who studied outside Europe and North America are too small to show.

What this might mean for you

If you're at Google

- Is "one more promo" something you want, or a reason to wait? Only about a quarter of the people who left moved up a level before they went.
- If you're looking at Amazon, Apple, Meta or Microsoft, is it for the work and the team? Only one in five who made that move took a bigger title.
- What would a move inside give you that a move outside wouldn't, and the other way round?
- If you're in your 40s and wondering whether the startup door has closed: people in their 40s joined startups about as often as people in their 30s.

If you've just left

- Is the next job the destination or a step? The first one after Google lasted about two and a half years.
- If you want a top job at a startup, what will your Google title buy you there? A smaller company now, or a later move, may get you there sooner.
- If you're thinking of starting something or going independent, you're in good company: Googlers did it more than most. Most of those companies are small firms, not funded startups.
- If AI is where you want to be, have you looked past the big labs? 18 of the 19 who went to an AI company joined a different one, mostly startups and scale-ups.

If you're a few years out

- Most people move several times, so the question is what you want this next move to do for you.
- If you're independent, is it how you want to work long term, or a bridge? People did both.
- Have you ruled out going back to Google, or to a big employer, without testing it? 77 people went back.

How I did it

Who's in it. The LinkedIn job histories of the people in my network whose profiles have been fully read, on 17 Nov 2026: 1,239 people who worked at Google as employees for a year or more (not interns, temps, vendors, contractors, programme roles or board-only roles). 979 have left and 286 are still there; the two overlap by 26 people who left and came back. A leaver is someone whose dates are complete and whose time at Google ended (gaps of up to three months count as one stay). DoubleClick, Waze, Nest and Looker count as Google from the date they were bought.

Why it's anecdotes, not a survey. These are the people I'm connected to, not a random sample of everyone at Google. I seek out founders, startup leaders, coaches and people who've gone independent, many of them in London, and most of the Googlers I know joined around the time I did. The comparison with "the other Big Tech people I know" (people who left Amazon, Microsoft, other US big tech and European big tech) shares the same leaning; the gap between Google and Amazon holds among people who left in the same years.

What the data can't say. Whether people earned more, enjoyed their work or felt glad they moved; why they left; how big a startup was when someone joined it; or how people found their next role. And LinkedIn only shows what people chose to write: titles can be out of date or rounded up, not every move is listed, and a title rarely shows someone's level or which part of Google they were in. Six months or more before the next job may be a chosen break, a job search or a missing start date.

How the groups work. Roles are read from the last title at Google and grouped by function, then by seniority, not by whether someone manages people. The line is the same everywhere: Staff level and above (Staff and Principal titles, and people managers: GPMs, EMs and team leads) on one side, and SWEs, PMs, Account Managers and similar on the other. So Staff PMs and GPMs sit with Directors of Product, and Staff, Senior Staff and Principal Engineers with EMs and Engineering Directors. Partnerships, ads sales and marketing split at the same line; gTech (including PSO, the equivalent DoubleClick teams, and sales, customer and Cloud engineers and solution architects), TPMs and People Ops have too few senior people to split. Each role card covers 20 or more people; other groups need 35. Titles that fit no group (analysts, operations, a plain "Manager") aren't shown. Seniority uses four groups read from titles, because Google levels don't show on LinkedIn: individual contributor (IC), Staff level, director or head, and VP or above (including MDs and GMs). "Big Five" in the tables means Amazon, Apple, Meta and Microsoft. Shares in a column add to 100%, give or take a point or two, unless a note says they overlap.

Age, gender and where people studied. Age is estimated from the year of someone's first degree (graduation year as 22), or from their first job where there's no degree date: 78% of the 964 people with an estimate have a degree date. Gender is read from first names only, for names overwhelmingly used for one gender; it's never recorded against anyone, only counted. Names can't reflect how anyone identifies. Study country is the country of the first degree's university. All three describe the people I know, and none of them says what anyone can do.

Where the labels come from. Destination types come from employer lists and my funding records; employers on no list were classified by AI from general knowledge. AI companies come from my funding records, a list of big AI labs and company names. Every table is produced by a script from the data, so the figures can be rerun.

Appendix

All the numbers

First move, by city

City of last role	Leavers	Startup	Founded	Independent	Big Five	Other big tech	Large corporate	Everything else	Left in 2016 or later	Live in another country now
London	281	25%	8%	15%	7%	16%	9%	20%	53%	24%
San Francisco Bay Area	184	27%	11%	7%	8%	22%	5%	20%	55%	16%
Zurich	38	21%	21%	26%	0%	11%	5%	16%	84%	34%
Dublin	35	14%	9%	14%	14%	34%	11%	3%	46%	62%

"Live in another country now" compares where someone was at Google with where they live today.

- **Most of them stayed in Switzerland.** Of the Zurich people who founded or went independent, most still live there, so it doesn't look like people leaving to start up elsewhere.
- **The Bay Area's low independent rate comes mostly from people who left before 2016.** Among people who left since 2016 it's 13%, close to London.

What people who left in 2021 or later did, by role

Left in 2021 or later	Leavers	Most common first moves	Bigger title	Most common first titles (people)
Product (PMs, GPMs, Directors of Product)	35	other big tech 26%, founded 20%, startup 17%	57%	Founder (7); Director of Product (5); Product manager (3)
Engineering (SWEs, SREs, Staff and Principal, EMs, Engineering Directors)	39	startup 38%, other big tech 18%, large corporate 10%	44%	Engineer or scientist (7); Engineering manager (5); VP Engineering (4); Founder (3); Director of Engineering (3)
Ads sales, partnerships, gTech and PSO	70	startup 30%, other big tech 17%, independent 13%	46%	Founder (7); Head of a team (6); Director (3)
Directors, MDs, VPs and GMs	56	independent 25%, startup 16%, founded 14%	39%	Founder (8); General manager or managing director (7); VP (4); Board or non-executive role (4); Advisor (4)

Startups and founders

	Google	Rest of big tech
Joined a startup first	24%	26%
...of whom as C-level	32%	32%
...as VP, head or director	35%	40%
...below head level	33%	27%
Founded a company first	11%	8%
Founded a company at some point	24%	21%

The three "of whom" rows split the startup joiners, so they add to 100% of the joiners.

Seniority when they left	Joined a startup first	Joiners	as C-level	as VP, head or director	below head
ICs (SWEs, PMs, TPMs, Account Managers and similar)	25%	137	18%	36%	47%
Staff level (Staff and Principal, GPMs, EMs, team leads)	21%	22	14%	45%	41%
Directors and Heads of	25%	69	61%	32%	7%

Only 8 of the 111 who started a company first appear in my records of European funding rounds.

Top titles today

Top title today	Google	Rest of big tech
Any top title	31%	35%
...in a company they joined (C-level, president, managing director)	14%	20%
...running their own company or firm (founders, including one-person firms)	17%	15%

First move by age when they left, for people who left in 2016 or later

	People	Startup or scale-up	Started a company	Independent	Big tech or large corporate	Something else, or nothing yet
20s	41	20%	10%	7%	44%	20%
30s	180	28%	12%	14%	33%	14%
40s	222	24%	9%	15%	32%	20%
50 and over	67	16%	9%	22%	15%	37%

Independent work

	Google	Rest of big tech
Independent first	12%	8%
Independent at some point	24%	20%
Independent now	14%	11%

The rows overlap, so they don't add up.

Did independent work last? People who went independent first, two or more years ago:

People who went independent first (left two or more years ago)	Share
People	105
Still independent today	39%
Now in a job or their own company	57%
No current job shown	4%

Where they are now: a startup or scale-up 15%, their own company 11%, a large corporate 7%, non-profit or public sector 7%, an investment firm 4%, an unclassified employer 4%, other big tech 4%. Those who moved on had been independent a median of 2.8 years.



Working out what you want to do next?

Book a free 20-minute Clarity Call. Tell me where you are and what you're weighing. I'll share some experiences that might help, and we'll work out your next step together: a session with me, an introduction to someone else who could help, or something to try first.

Book a Clarity Call →

Know someone at Google wondering what's next? Send them the report: richardrussell.co/resources/what-xooglers-do-next.

And whether you've left or you're thinking about it, connect with me on LinkedIn and send me a message: linkedin.com/in/richardarussell. I'd like to know if this matches what you've seen.

Richard Russell

richardrussell.co