

Peter Reven – Case Study

Ed Bayo, November 2024¹

It was a cold November evening when Peter packed his rucksack and made his way to Salzburg Central Station. Enthusiastic tourists strolled past to the left and right, while locals enjoyed glühwein and chestnuts. It was the eve of the first Sunday in Advent and the city of Salzburg was glowing with evening charm. But Peter barely noticed the festive atmosphere. With his hood pulled low over his face, he walked through the narrow streets of Salzburg - with only one thought running through his head: “What's going on with me?”

Peter, the “shooting star”

Peter, 29 years old and a native of Salzburg, was co-founder and CEO of *SalzSpire*, a fintech start-up that used artificial intelligence to help young people with their annual tax returns. Their main product was an app designed specifically for people between the ages of 18 and 25. Registration was free and the startup gained a lot of traction in its first year, especially among Salzburg university students. The team of five also worked on a premium version for companies, which would offer a financial dashboard.

At the age of 22, Peter had completed his Master's degree in economics with honors. He soon began working at the headquarters of a renowned Salzburg-based company and quickly became known as an up-and-coming, high-performing manager. At the age of 25, he began a part-time MBA course at a renowned business school. Headhunters regularly contacted him, and even his boss often emphasized how indispensable Peter was for the company. But Peter had other plans. For years, he had dreamed of founding his own company - a company that could change the world. His career had brought him much praise, but he felt that his potential was not fully realized in a traditional office job. The next step had to be bigger.

After completing his MBA, he decided to travel around North America with an old college friend. At a TED conference in Vancouver, they met inspiring founders, thinkers and CEOs. Peter was thrilled by the atmosphere and dreamed of one day standing on a big stage himself. During a visit to Stanford University, the two friends finally decided to found a start-up in Salzburg. This is how *SalzSpire* was born.

Within a few months, the company made a name for itself in Salzburg and the surrounding area through clever marketing. It was mentioned in local media and in a renowned Austrian start-up magazine. A Salzburg newspaper named *SalzSpire* “Startup of the Year” and dedicated a detailed article to the team with a photo in which everyone looked radiantly optimistic. The media attention ultimately led to an investment of 100,000 euros from a local investor. “It's a good start,” said Peter in the interview. “Our big goal: to become a Salzburg unicorn.”

Lisa and Peter

Lisa and Peter met during their studies. She, a young woman from a small town in Bavaria, and he, a Salzburger from the Tennengau region. Somehow fate had brought them together and they

¹ This case study is provided as an example in the context of the TEDxSalzburg event on November 30, 2024. It is entirely fictional and does not pursue any political, religious, or other agenda. Any similarities to actual persons, organizations, or events are purely coincidental and unintentional. The purpose of this case study is to foster discussion and reflection within the framework of the talks.

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had been a couple for over ten years. After graduating, Lisa began a career at a large company in the “People & Culture” department. She was smart, dynamic and full of joie de vivre.

In the summer, Lisa celebrated her 28th birthday in her hometown - an exuberant celebration with the whole family. But when she approached Peter later that evening about their future together, he felt overwhelmed. She wanted to know when they would get married and have children. Peter, who had had a little too much to drink that evening, was evasive: “I’m not ready yet. Work is demanding everything from me right now.” He knew his answer disappointed her, but he couldn’t bring himself to continue the topic.

A week later, Peter gave a keynote speech in Munich. On the train ride back, he thought about his personal branding. After all, he had managed to get on the cover of an important start-up magazine. But the situation at his company was tense. Investors and his co-founder were increasingly concerned about his frequent keynote appearances, while the launch of the main product was delayed. Inwardly, Peter began to doubt Salzburg: “Maybe it’s because of this city. Berlin or Barcelona would be so much easier for a startup.” Thoughts of Lisa and her desire for a family also nagged at him. They had argued the night before. But he pushed the thoughts aside. Instead, he put on his AirPods. While his favorite song “Forever Young” played on an endless loop, he was overwhelmed by inexplicable, unpleasant feelings. Attempts to distract himself with his cell phone initially failed due to the poor connection. Memories of his mother’s funeral, which had taken place a year earlier after her battle with cancer, suddenly resurfaced. His eyes grew moist. When the phone signal returned, a message from his investor reached him, requesting an urgent meeting.

The Breakdown

When Peter got home, the silence of the apartment struck him immediately. In the kitchen, he found a handwritten note from Lisa. She wrote that she needed time to think. She felt held back by him and wanted to gain clarity about their relationship. Lisa mentioned she would be flying to Greece with a friend.

Peter made himself a gin and tonic and sat down on the couch, but his thoughts wouldn’t leave him alone. He picked up his game console but put it aside after just a few minutes. Briefly, he considered calling a friend who was a psychotherapist. But he decided against it. Instead, he packed a few things and headed to Tennengau to spend the weekend at the old family farm.

It was the eve of the first Sunday in Advent when Peter stepped off the suburban train under the first snowflakes. On the steep mountain road, enveloped in darkness, he finally let his emotions flow freely. Questions he had suppressed for too long now pressed into his mind: the future of his company, his relationship with Lisa, and the profound existential questions of life. Why was he, of all people, facing such a crisis?

When he arrived at the abandoned family farm, it stood cold and dark before him. But as he turned around, his gaze fell on the clear night sky where the clouds had dissipated. Above him, countless stars sparkled, and the snow-covered mountain peaks glowed softly in the silvery light of the full moon. In this overwhelming silence, Peter, for the first time in weeks, felt a spark of new courage: it was time to seize the day and change his life.