

GOING GRIT

# Valerie van Zuijlen: “You have to go all in!”

What is the key to success? Is it about talent, intelligence or creativity – and what about your resources, like money or a vast network? Or is it about grit: the passion and perseverance one dedicates to reaching long-term and meaningful goals? In Going Grit, we explore the stories of innovators in health & high tech. We dive into their inspirations and motivations as we try to understand their leitmotiv. Will we get a glimpse of their grit factor? This edition: Valerie van Zuijlen, founder of creative innovation hub Labnest in Ede, the Netherlands.

Valerie completed several studies, ranging from graphic design to computer science and electrical engineering to film science. To do so, she travelled the world: from Amsterdam to New York and Stanford. “After completing multiple masters, I thought, what’s next? I met a lot of entrepreneurs during my time in the United States. Back then, I already wondered what it would be like to create a place where so many amazing ideas could come together, to work on them with like-minded, young entrepreneurs.”

To bring together the world of science, technology and creativity, Valerie founded Labnest. Labnest is an innovation lab with an accelerator program for pre-stage starters. At Labnest, they believe in the power of innovative start-ups that want to change the world.

### Valerie

“A start-up takes more than just a good idea. I met so many young and talented people, and so many of them didn’t know what to do, just like me.” That’s when she realised that a start-up takes more than just a good idea. “The funny thing is, Labnest is also still a start-up. I went through the same journey as the start-ups we are now mentoring. You need legal advice, strategic thinking, marketing branding, business coaches, prototyping, and the list goes on. That’s why I founded Labnest two years ago in Ede. We started with four start-ups, and they went from idea to business within nine months. After the summer, we will begin the journey of three new start-ups.”

**“A START-UP TAKES MORE THAN JUST A GOOD IDEA.”**

One of the goals is to give people an idea of how to successfully start a company. “We want to be a stepping stone. We try to find partnerships and let new companies cooperate. I’ve had some meetings with the government to make the Netherlands a better place for start-ups. Funding is the biggest issue, and we try to make that happen by making it more regular and accessible. From our offices in Ede, we try to find companies or people that want to invest in these start-ups.”

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### Never give up

Valerie believes that if you really want something, you should go for it. You shouldn’t give up! “Even if you’ve heard a thousand no’s, you might get a yes next time. It’s like a rush of adrenaline when it works out.”

Another thing that immensely inspires Valerie is being surrounded by start-ups. “Everyone is trying to help each other with their network. You know exactly what the others are dealing with. You need the drive of wanting to succeed. You need to be all in. Whenever you are successful, it gives you the energy to keep going.”

Valerie adds that knowing what you want to achieve is essential. A long-term and a short-term goal. And both goals need to be adjusted occasionally. “A period like the summer gives me some perspective of what I want and need for my personal goals and my start-up Labnest. These are two separate things, but I need to make sure I maintain my focus on both goals.”

### Don’t be afraid

Valerie says a helicopter view is very important for a start-up. “A lot is happening: ideas, strategies, maintaining your network and socials, financial and legal issues, and so on. You’ve got to keep up with everything, but you also need to be able to see what’s important and what’s less important. Focus is key! To keep that focus, you need to look at it from a distance.”

As a start-up, Labnest too gets feedback from other start-ups. Valerie’s advice: “Listen closely and use feedback like that.” And finally, she has a tip: “Don’t be afraid and start your start-up! Dare to be brave. It might look scary, but we need changemakers. We can make a difference!”

