

Decision Logic Snapshot

A promotion you did not get,
a startup offer, and the question of what comes next

Sample case: “Marina” — Regional Marketing Director in a multinational company, Dubai

Please read first

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WHAT YOU ASKED ME

Should I leave my current company and join my former manager as COO / co-founder, or stay where I am?

MY SHORT ANSWER

Do not resign yet. Your choice is not “safe job or startup.” You have a third path you have not tested: pursue a genuine general-management role in an established business while you force the startup offer to become concrete. Right now the startup asks you to commit before the funding, authority, equity protections and operating boundaries are clear. That is too much uncertainty for a decision whose main attraction is precisely greater responsibility and control.

What you came in with

You came in feeling that you had two choices: stay in a strong corporate role after missing a GM promotion, or take a lower-paid COO / co-founder offer in a very early-stage startup. The session showed that this is not actually a two-option decision.

WHAT YOU TOLD ME	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
8 years in the current company; about 3 years as Regional Marketing Director	You are not escaping a bad job. You are considering leaving a platform that still gives you income, reputation, a strong team and market credibility.
You were not selected for a GM role	The company's stated reason is broader commercial and P&L; experience, not poor performance.
You value stability, a high-quality environment and the weight of your current title	These are real assets, not signs that you are "too cautious." Any alternative has to compensate for what you are giving up.
The startup offers COO / co-founder, salary about 30–35% lower and 12% equity	The upside is broader responsibility and ownership. The cash compensation is worse and the equity is not yet fully defined.
Funding is not closed; the founder is raising roughly AED 4–5m pre-seed	The company is not yet financially de-risked. You are being asked for commitment before the money is in the bank.
Full salary starts after funding closes	You do not have to resign immediately, which creates room to test the opportunity before making an irreversible move.
You have not seriously searched the market for GM / broader business roles	A major option is missing from the decision because you have not tested whether the market will give you the role you actually want.

THE FIRST THING I WOULD CHANGE ABOUT THE QUESTION

You are asking, "Should I stay or join the startup?" The question underneath it is: "What is the best route from functional leadership into whole-business responsibility — without repeating a pattern where I carry the result but do not control the conditions?"

What is actually going on

Four things are happening at the same time. The startup offer matters, but it is not the whole decision.

1 · You do want a different kind of career

When you compared a 20% pay rise without GM responsibility against a GM role elsewhere at today's salary, you chose the GM role. That tells me this is not mainly a money problem. You want to move from functional leadership into responsibility for the business as a whole.

2 · The missed promotion accelerated a question that was already waiting

You did not actively search for a startup before the GM decision. The rejection made the limits of your current path much more visible. That does not make the desire to leave irrational; it does mean you should not let one disappointment choose the destination for you.

3 · The startup offers exactly what your current role withholds — but in an unfinished form

It offers ownership, breadth and influence. At the same time, the founder remains CEO, owns the company today, the 12% is still subject to vesting and future dilution, decision rights are not written down, and funding is not closed.

4 · Your own career history contains a warning

In the Saudi launch you became the person holding a cross-functional problem together without formal authority. You succeeded, but you burned yourself out. The startup could become an upgraded version of the same pattern if “COO / co-founder” means you carry everything while someone else keeps final control.

Missed GM promotion stronger need to prove you can lead a whole business startup offer arrives with title, equity and broad scope offer feels like the door your company did not open unresolved authority / funding / role questions become easier to overlook because the opportunity answers an emotional and professional need at the same time.

That does not mean the startup is wrong. It means the offer has to survive a harder test than “does it feel like the next level?”

Where your own thinking is working against you

WHAT YOU DO	WHY IT COSTS YOU
You have been treating this as a binary choice	The third option — external GM / broader operating role in an established company — directly matches what you say you want and has not been tested.
The title COO / co-founder is doing some of the work for the offer	The title sounds like the move you were denied. But title, authority, economic ownership and practical control are four different things.
You are giving the startup credit for future conditions that do not yet exist	Funding, team, brands, investor money and operating structure are still partly prospective. Your decision should distinguish what is signed from what is expected.
You know you over-function when the system is weak	Your instinct under pressure is to take more on, not less. In a startup that can become a permanent job design, not a temporary crisis.
You are assuming the market may not give you a GM role before you test it	That may be true. But right now it is an untested belief, not a market result.

SOMETHING YOU SAID THAT DOES NOT ADD UP

You said the part of corporate life that frustrates you most is being accountable for outcomes without enough authority. Then you considered entering a company where the founder remains CEO, the split of decision rights is not written down, the team is barely formed, and you may become the person who “holds the whole business engine.” That can be a route to real authority — or the most concentrated version of the problem you are trying to leave.

What this means. The startup should not be judged by the title it gives you. It should be judged by whether the actual operating structure gives you enough authority, resources and protection to carry the responsibility it wants from you.

Your three options, and what each one really asks of you

OPTION	WHAT YOU GET	WHAT COULD GO WRONG	WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE FIRST
A · Stay and wait	Income, team, reputation and continuity. You keep a strong platform while the company talks about broader scope.	Another one or two years pass and you are still a functional leader with no clear route to GM. Resentment grows.	A credible internal path: named responsibilities, timing, P&L; exposure and senior sponsorship — not general promises about future growth.
B · Join the startup	Immediate breadth, ownership exposure, a co-founder title and a chance to build a business rather than a function.	Funding slips, the company remains under-resourced, your 12% is diluted, or “partner” means you execute while the founder decides. You may recreate the same responsibility-without-authority problem in a harsher environment.	Funding closed; employment economics clear; equity fully understood; decision rights documented; realistic hiring / resource plan; founder behaviour during a trial period supports the partnership story.
C · Build a third path first	You keep your current platform while testing two things: whether the market will hire you into general management, and whether the startup survives proper due diligence and a limited working trial.	You may lose the startup offer if the founder insists on immediate commitment. External GM search may take longer than you want.	You are willing to tolerate a few months of ambiguity instead of forcing a permanent answer in two weeks.

What I think today

I would choose Option C now. Not because I think the startup is a bad business, and not because I think you should stay in your current company long term. I think you are ready to move beyond a pure marketing role. What is not ready is the evidence that this particular startup is the right vehicle for that move.

Do not reject the startup. Make it earn the right to become your next job.

What I would do next: buy information before you give up options

The next 30–60 days should not be used to “decide harder.” They should be used to remove the uncertainties that matter.

1. Test the external market immediately.

Speak to senior recruiters and selected companies about GM, Country Manager, business-unit and broader commercial / operating roles. Do not ask whether you are “good enough.” Find out what experience they consider missing and what roles the market will actually interview you for.

2. Ask your current company for a concrete development path.

If they genuinely see you moving toward general management, ask what role, what P&L; exposure, what market and what time horizon would make that happen. “We see growth for you” is not a plan.

3. Turn the startup conversation into written terms.

Do not commit on the basis of title and trust. Ask for a clear role scope, decision rights, founder / COO boundaries, hiring authority, budget authority and the issues that require joint approval.

4. Make funding a condition, not a prediction.

You do not resign until funding is closed and there is a defined operating runway. Ask what amount has actually landed, what the monthly burn is, and how much salary / operating capacity that gives the company.

5. Understand the 12% before assigning value to it.

You need specialist legal review of vesting, cliff, dilution, leaver provisions, voting rights, treatment on termination and what happens in future rounds. Twelve percent is not one economic fact until those mechanics are known.

6. Use an advisory trial only if your current contract allows it.

Keep it tightly bounded: fixed hours, defined deliverables and no quiet drift into doing the COO job for free. The point is to test how the two of you make decisions together.

7. Set your own acceptance criteria before the negotiations move you.

Write down the minimum conditions under which the startup is genuinely preferable to staying or taking an external GM role. Then judge the offer against those conditions, not against the disappointment of the missed promotion.

WHAT THE TEST TELLS YOU

If the external market responds well, the decision is no longer “corporate safety versus entrepreneurship.” You have evidence that a broader leadership role is available without taking startup risk. If the startup becomes concrete — funded, governed, properly documented and workable in practice — then the risk may be worth taking. If neither happens, staying for now is not failure; it is preserving your option value while you build the missing experience deliberately.

If you still want to join the startup

I would not tell you to negotiate a specific percentage or legal structure on the information we have. I would tell you what needs to be clear before the word “co-founder” means anything useful.

- Funding: what amount is actually committed, what amount is in the bank, and what runway that creates after salaries, inventory, launch costs and working capital.
- Role: what you decide alone, what the CEO decides alone, and what requires both of you.
- Resources: which hires are funded, when they are expected, and what you are personally expected to cover until then.
- Equity: whether 12% is calculated before or after the fundraising, how future dilution works, and what happens if you leave or are removed.
- Vesting: four years with a one-year cliff is only the headline. The exit / termination mechanics matter just as much.
- Founder behaviour: what happens when you disagree. This is not a clause you can fully solve on paper; it is something you should observe before resigning.
- Business evidence: signed or near-signed brand arrangements, realistic launch assumptions and the investor process — not only the founder’s confidence in them.
- Personal downside: what income reduction you can actually tolerate and how long you can tolerate it if the company misses plan.

The part people get wrong

The question is not whether 12% sounds generous for joining without investing cash. Your real investment is the salary you give up, the career option you leave behind, the time you spend vesting and the risk that you become operationally indispensable in a company you do not control. Sweat equity is still an investment; it is just paid in a different currency.

What the problem is, and what it is not

YOU SAID	WHAT I THINK IS CLOSER TO THE TRUTH
“I need to decide whether to stay or join him.”	You need to decide which route gives you real whole-business responsibility on acceptable terms. There are more than two routes.
“The startup gives me the GM-type scope I want.”	It may. At the moment it gives you a promise of broad scope; the authority and resources behind that promise are not yet defined.
“I was rejected for GM, so maybe I need to create my own opportunity.”	Maybe. But the market has not yet rejected you for GM. You have not tested it.
“I want more responsibility.”	Yes — but your own history says responsibility without structure can turn into over-functioning and burnout.

THE ORDER I WOULD DO THIS IN

1 · Start external GM search and recruiter conversations 2 · Ask current employer for a concrete path 3 · Formalise startup role / funding / equity conditions 4 · If contract permits, run a tightly bounded advisory trial 5 · Compare real offers and evidence, then resign only when one path has actually earned the decision.

What I am not sure about

This is what I think after one conversation. These are the things that could materially change the recommendation:

- I do not know your household financial position, savings, fixed obligations or how much income reduction you can comfortably absorb. That changes how much startup risk is rational for you.
- I have not seen the startup financial model, investor materials, brand agreements or any evidence of committed funding. I cannot judge the quality of the business itself from the founder's description alone.
- I have not seen the draft offer or the equity documents. The economic value of 12% can change dramatically depending on dilution, vesting, termination and shareholder rights.
- I do not know how your former manager behaves when you disagree as peers rather than when he was your boss. That may be one of the most important unknowns in the whole decision.
- I do not know what the external market will actually offer you. Your concern that a marketing background may block an immediate GM move is plausible, but it is currently untested.
- I do not know whether your current employment contract permits advisory work in a related consumer sector. That needs to be checked before any trial arrangement.

One last thing.

You do not seem to be choosing between ambition and safety. You are choosing between different ways of becoming the kind of operator you already want to become. The mistake would be to treat the first offer that carries the right title as proof that it is the right structure. Keep the ambition. Make the structure earn it.

Based on a simulated session. Any recommendation would change if the facts change or documents show a different picture. Strategic and analytical advisory: not therapy, coaching, legal, financial, investment or employment advice.

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