



Be better.

Dejan doesn't consider himself an a just one of the good guys who would change the corporate culture of all Europe.



Christopher Maurer

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9 minutes

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“I know I’m not a messiah, and I don’t want to brainwash anyone,” says Dejan Stojanovic, who, after the failure of his own startup, started events in Austria to promote a culture of accepting failure. Fuckup Nights are now held in 260 cities around the world. The aim of the informal, late-night shows is to break down the taboos surrounding making mistakes and show business people that it can be done differently.

attended my first Fuckup Night as part of the ViennaUP conference in 2025. The event was held in a very special, circus-like space: a ring-shaped

I stage in the middle, while the audience sits in a circle, on top of each other, or even on the floor. I later learned that this Viennese community space is the home turf of Dejan Stojanovic's show, and new releases almost always debut here.

The Fuckup Nights initiative can be summarized briefly as an attempt to accept and strengthen the culture of making mistakes. In a little more detail: the goal is to make the business world not only talk about success stories, but also about the times when something goes wrong.

“I want to change business thinking not just in Austria, but throughout Europe,” says Dejan. We are talking in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel in central Vienna, the day after the presentation. Instead of a suit, Dejan is now wearing a baseball cap and a sweater, but he explains with the same vehemence.

• HIRDETÉS

“Most people only like to talk about their business when the working out, they’ve done it. I prefer stories about mistakes them.”



Dejan Stojanovic presented the 48th edition of FuckUp Nights at the ViennaUP conference in May. Photo: Fuckup Nights Vienna / Wolf al

Ten years of fuckup

Dejan Stojanovic held his first Fuckup Night in the fall of 2014 with a very clear vision: he wanted to build a community, not a business. He emphasizes this many times during our conversation. The first show was followed by 47 more editions, and Dejan has given more than 100 performances in Austria, with at least 300 different speakers.

“It's very important that the brand is ours. But what's more i values behind it. And a lot of people. I'm probably the proud

A typical FuckUp Night looks like Dejan giving a short talk about the culture of mistakes, followed by three speakers sharing their own experiences. The event I attended included stories of early company sales, unreliable investment partners, and too-slow market adaptation.

Bernhard Hauser, founder of Waterglass, was one of the speakers. Bernhard talked about how he and his previous startup created an API (application programming interface) for other companies to use WhatsApp for business purposes. The concept quickly became popular, with clients including Uber and Danone.



Bernhard Hauser (left) tells Dejan about his own fuckup story. Photo: Fuckup Nights Vienna, Wolf and Woodpecker

The problem arose when Whatsapp decided to defend its territory and launched a similar development on the market. The Bernhards did not react quickly enough: years of good growth completely withered in less than a year.

Bernhard says it's important to have conscious individuals who set an example and own up to when they mess up. "In an environment where there's no negative feedback or disdain, it's easy to open up. And then from there, the really good ideas come from somewhere."

"It's not hard to find speakers these days. In fact, we're currently there's a waiting list."

– says Dejan. He adds: "There are a lot of instructive stories around us. And it is very positive that people are increasingly taking them on."

62 countries, 260 cities

The concept of Fuckup Nights may be familiar from Hungary, although similar shows are organized less frequently here, while the program series has a more established culture in Vienna. Although it may sound strange at first, we can better understand the connection between the Hungarian and Austrian show if we travel across the Atlantic first.

The first Fuckup Nights were held not in Europe, or even in the United States, but in Mexico, in 2012. Today, thirteen years later, we can hear lectures on the importance of the culture of making mistakes in 260 cities in 62 different countries.

“In 2014, I decided to start something similar. I saw that this project existed on another continent. I told them that I would either expand their brand or start something of my own. That meeting ended in a deal and a no-brainer,” Dejan recalls.

More of this

"There are more and more big capitalists who previously did not give money to the media. They feel the responsibility"

My biggest problem in Vienna is that the wind is always blowing – the most livable city in the world through the eyes of two ex-Budapests

However, the international structure of Fuckup Nights should not be thought of as a network, most cities operate individually, with only a slight connection between them. Yet, Dejan's show was also seen by a "colleague" from Prague, for example.

“Of course, we talk to each other. I have strong connections mainly with German-speaking areas, but I know people in Canada, Bulgaria, Turkey, and many other places. I am proud to call them my colleagues to some extent.”

Dejan doesn't deny that the relationship with the Mexican founders was complicated. "I don't think they expected it to grow to this point in Europe. What was a hit then is something completely different now, there are contradictions. But I don't want this story to be about that."

**“This isn't about them, or even about me. It's more about a c
make a positive difference.”**



Fuckup Nights group photo at the latest Vienna show, the ViennaUP conference. Photo: Fuckup Nights Vienna, Wolf and Woodpecker

As if taking risks is in the air overseas

Dejan has worked in many fields over the years: he graduated from law school, worked for an insurance company, and then fell in love with the tech world. He and a colleague came up with an idea and launched a startup based on it. The target audience for the business was the Austrian automotive industry: he wanted to connect car dealers with customers.

"During this period, I talked to a lot of people in the automotive industry, trying to explain my idea to them. Almost everyone was unsure. I got a lot of feedback from them saying they liked what I came up with, but it was too risky," he says.

"Do you know how many times I've been told to just go it alone the project gets going? It's really frustrating to hear that all that started looking into why people think that way."

According to Dejan, it is clear that America is much more advanced in business thinking than Europe. He has been to Silicon Valley several times, meeting important figures from the local tech world. But the difference in attitude is not only felt at the companies: it is as if taking risks is in the air overseas.

“The best example is a conversation I had with an airport taxi driver. He asked me why I was here, and I told him about my startup. He just kept asking me questions. What is my market strategy? What is my marketing plan? Have I thought about this, have I thought about that?

He said he liked my dedication, he thought my dream would 25 minutes, and then we never met again. It was very uplifting to apologize. They truly believed in me.”



Dejan has been through almost every sector before finding his own love project. Photo: Fuckup Nights Vienna, Wolf and Woodpecker

Despite the taxi driver's blessing, the startup failed. Dejan considers this his personal fuckup story. Although he couldn't reform the automotive industry, he wouldn't call this period a complete failure because he learned a lot. In fact, it gave him the first clues for his new project.

"The difference between the two continents is that in Europe they are afraid of making mistakes," Dejan explains. He believes this is because Europe has been defending itself rather than building since the post-World War II reconstruction. Everyone now thinks of America as "the land of dreams." According to Dejan, this could be changed.

"Not everything is good in the United States, in fact. But the exceptional. Society celebrates people who dare to take risks don't succeed at something. Then they just try again."

This realization was the turning point. He dug himself into the **fuckup culture** and started building something completely different.

90 minutes of impressions

Dejan hosts an average of one show a month, mostly in Vienna, but not exclusively. The Austrian FuckUp Nights has also been to Linz and the southernmost province of the country, Carinthia. He also offers company training courses: he claims there is a huge demand for this, and he visits 2-3 different companies a month.

The performances usually sell 200 tickets. According to Dejan, this is the limit where a show still retains its personal character. I remember standing at the door at the previous evening's show, greeting the audience one by one. We're not talking about idle attention: there was a guest who he was later able to address by name when he showed up.

"I'm not thinking about expanding. This is just the right amount of people where the miracle can happen that before the show the room is full of strangers, but by the end everyone opens up and the conversations start."

Fuckup Nights have been free for 11 years, you just have to register online. Dejan says the events sell out within an hour. However, he has not considered charging for them in the future.

"I want to change the culture. And to do that, I need a team that belong. I think that's something that shouldn't be monetized"



Dejan and Caroline Kaiser (right) at the latest edition of Fuckup Nights in Vienna. Photo: Fuckup Nights Vienna, Wold and Woodpecker

The fact that the event is free is not a common practice. Similar shows are also charged in many cities around the world. This also shows that the shows in different countries are mostly related only by their names.

Although Dejan and his wife don't make money from ticket sales, they do get support from a number of companies. They also earn money from coaching companies, and Dejan also has other projects in addition to the show. These factors form the basis for what he often emphasizes: Fuckup Nights is not about the money.

"10 years ago, we were happy if 50 people came to an event. Today, wherever we advertise, it's sold out. Companies are paying closer attention, it's no coincidence that further training is popular. The media is also covering the topic more and more. This shows that what we do has an impact," says Dejan.

"For me, seeing this is enough. I'm not an angel, just one of

Many people visit Dejan's shows multiple times, as they are produced several times a year, and there is always some new content. However, there are also those who only listen to the show once, and there are often skeptical voices.

“Look, I know I’m not a messiah, and I don’t want to brainwash anyone,” Dejan says with great energy. “All I ask is that everyone come along for an evening and listen to the stories. If I can change one person’s mind, I’m satisfied.”

Dejan doesn't know how much longer he will continue. After the jubilee, 10-year performance, he thought about closing an important chapter in his life. He wants to stay free and deal with the matters of his heart. He made a deal with himself: as soon as he feels that there is nothing left to move him forward, he will stop FuckUp Nights. One thing is certain – this will not be a strategic decision.

"I still feel the fire. Maybe that's why I'm sometimes too vehemement that they can't say no to me. I've learned to go, to believe, and making mistakes."

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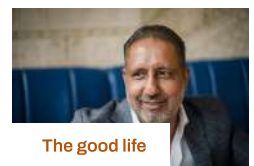
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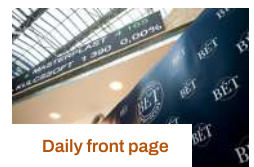
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