

The Profile: The astronaut chasing Mars & Silicon Valley's spin master

Good morning, friends.

I have three things to start your Sunday:

One: There are really great profiles this week. You can't go wrong.

Two: I spoke about work, life, and Softbank (of course) on the Tusk Ventures podcast. (Who knew speaking in complete sentences would be such a struggle?) [Listen here.](#)

Three: I set up an experiment on Telegram — a messaging group where we can discuss Profile stories & have deeper conversations with the numerous intelligent people that subscribe. I'm hoping for more of a *New York Times*-like discussion than a Reddit meme thread. [Join me here.](#)

Here we go:

- [Silicon Valley's spin master](#) **[**HIGHLY RECOMMEND**]**
- [The astronaut chasing Mars](#)
- [The celebrities with no fans](#)
- [The VC firm betting on equality](#)
- [The tech firms hiring ex-prisoners](#)

PEOPLE TO KNOW.

[Silicon Valley's spin master](#): Margit Wennmachers has quietly shaped the public narrative of Andreessen Horowitz over the last 10 years. When things go sideways, she sends an email with the subject line: "4B." It's a nod to the idea that plans 1 through 3 didn't work, and neither did plan 4A, so it's time to resort to 4B. This is one of the many tricks of the trade that Margit has developed during her decades of experience putting out fires in Silicon Valley. [Tweet this story.](#)

"Her advice has always been transparency and honesty — just tell the story, warts and all."

[The astronaut chasing Mars](#): Franklin Chang Díaz immigrated to the U.S. at age 18 with a single goal: Become an astronaut. The only English he knew was "Hello, my name is Franklin" and "Where is the school?" In the ultimate American Dream story, Diaz clawed his way to NASA, tied the record for most space flights & now holds the key to deep space travel. [Tweet this story.](#)

"He imagines the Earth will become a protected area for humans, like a giant national park."

[The celebrities with no fans:](#) Celebrities, CEOs, musicians, models, and porn stars are buying millions of fake Twitter followers. Why? Because everyone wants to be popular online. But popularity has a steep price. This story goes inside social media's black market that manufacturers modern-day "influencers" for the right price. [Tweet this story.](#)

"Social media is a virtual world that is filled with half bots, half real people. You can't take any tweet at face value. And not everything is what it seems."

COMPANIES TO WATCH.

[The VC firm betting on equality:](#) This story delves into the inner-workings of Aspect Ventures, a rare gender-balanced VC firm. The strategy is in direct conflict with an industry where just 7% of investors are female. And now, LPs are taking notice. Rather than chase Silicon Valley's bad boys, endowments & fund-of-funds are looking to back firms who make diversity a priority. [Tweet this story.](#)

"The question now: Is this newish breed of VCs truly in a position to challenge the established firms that have long ruled Sand Hill Road? Or is this trend just another one of tech's passing fads?"

[The tech firms hiring ex-prisoners:](#) Companies including Facebook, Google, and Koch Industries have made public promises to hire some of the 70 million Americans with a criminal record. They're supported by firms like [70MillionJobs](#) that have emerged to help ex-prisoners re-enter society. These companies are training & hiring ex-cons as software engineers & developers because of their belief that rehabilitation is more effective than punishment. [Tweet this story.](#)

"Some of these guys, their whole life people have been telling them they aren't anything. We're telling them they're an asset."