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Tough Love: Burcham Pushes Entrepreneurs To Get Ready for Investors

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Getting access to the Entrepreneur Center doesn't guarantee a recommendation to investors.

CEO [Michael Burcham](#) said he is not a gatekeeper to the investment world. But he doesn't throw out endorsements until he believes a company is ready.

"I can't send an introduction with my endorsement if I don't believe you are ready," Burcham said. "I never try to mislead the investment community. It's an important relationship for the center to work."

Those who have been mentored by Burcham or have watched him in pitch sessions attest to his honest reactions.

"He really cares about the entrepreneurs and wants to help them, and yet he's also not too soft with them," said Vic Gatto, a partner at Solidus Co. in Nashville. "There are some people who love entrepreneurs and who are always cheerleaders, when cheering may not be called for. Sometimes tough love is required. ... It's from a place of really trying to help them so they don't embarrass themselves in front of investors."

Ben Fruin, co-founder of music tech company Listen Up, went through the accelerator program last fall. Every week, Burcham told him something he did not want to hear, he said.

"It's like having that coach," he said. "It's tough going through it, but when you look back three or four or five years later, it's the person who pushed you and ended up having the greatest impact and made you who you are as an entrepreneur."

Burcham said the program is not a perfect fit for every entrepreneur. "I don't expect we will ever be the place where virtually every entrepreneur in the city would choose to be," he said. "You can't be a one-size-fits-all for everybody."