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Hybrids: Entrepreneurs Must Lead People from Radically Different Sectors

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Kim Smith, co-founder and CEO of NewSchools Venture Fund, is a leader in a hybrid environment between business people and educators, who speak different languages and come from different frameworks. A hybrid in this context includes the public sector, non-public sector and business sector. It is difficult to manage a group that comes from such diverse backgrounds, says Smith. A lot of technology companies have to deal with the same sort of dynamic between technologists and business people.



Transcript

So I typically start by showing a little bit about my personal background. I don't know how easy that it is to see, but first of all, my parents are both educators. My mom was a special ed teacher in a public elementary school and my father was a professor of education administration. So I learned a lot about public education growing up, both at the classroom level and at the systems level. I personally got a degree in political science and psychology at Columbia because I was really interested in people and how people come together in systems, which most people thought was a bizarre combination but has proven to be very helpful to me both as an entrepreneur and now as an investor. I did some consulting in business education partnerships when I was in school, in both high school and college. Part of what I learned in that process was that business people and educators speak a different language. I think most of the people in this audience have probably been on teams with people who come from a very different framework, whether it's business people and engineers which is probably what many of you experienced or business people and educators. It is very complicated to be a leader in an environment that we call a hybrid which means people come from dramatically different perspectives. For us, a hybrid means crossing the public sector, the nonprofit sector and the business sector.

So that's sort of our version of hybrid. It has these three parts but I think a lot of technology companies have both technologists and business people who have to deal with some of the same leadership dynamics.