Stanford eCorner

Career Development: Going in circles until you come home

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Kim describes her own path into game development at EA. She majored in film making as an undergraduate, started working in management consulting, and then decided to start a web-design company. Afterward she acquired an MBA and joined a startup company. Later on, she joined EA online in an entry-level position.

Transcript

So I sort of master minded myself into EA and almost lost my way. I actually majored in filmmaking in my undergrad. I studied at Wellesley in NYU. After graduating -- and I've been a gamer all my life. Played games with my brother all the time and we always dreamed about how it would be great to make games one day. I graduated from undergrad with a film degree. I actually started working in management consulting and did that for about a year and a half. And then went off with some friends and decided to start a web design company, and did that for a while. That was at a time when the Internet was starting to get pretty big and we're getting lots of projects. And our business was growing but the two guys I started that business with, late at night we would sit there, get out the N64, play games all through the night and then be wrecked the next day from playing games.

And then sitting there and talk about how great it would be to make games. So I remember sort of at that point, being at the crossroads and thinking to myself, "I could either go to pursue this Internet thing for a while and see where it goes," because at the time, there were sort of colleagues making millions and I thought that was crazy. Or figure out a way to start working in games. And so I thought about a number of different opportunities and ways how to try to get there. I didn't have any contacts. And with a film degree, I was running actually the business portion of that web design firm. I thought it might be a pretty good idea for me to get back to school. So I decided to go get my MBA and applied to a bunch of different schools, largely schools that had a sort of an entertainment division as well as a business division. Have I known there was a degree like this, maybe I would have tried to go for something like this. And I also applied to Harvard on a fluke.

I got in there and then I was like, "Oh, God, what do I do?" Ended up going to Harvard which was a very generalized MBA program. It was a really an excellent experience so we can have a Stanford-Harvard burn down after this, if you guys want. But it was really a great experience. My second year in that program, you can actually design your own course curriculum, start to explore your personal interests. My intention was to go into games. My business school application was all about games and where the games are going. I sort of took that second year to sort of develop a network of contacts. It was mainly an excuse for me to call up my favorite game designers and kiss their butts and try to spend some time with them, which I sort of had the privilege of doing. I ended up sort of meeting up a host of people from EA. And then at the last moment, I graduated 2000, so at that point, it was the height of the Internet boom.

And I did the ultimate folly and did a sort of a lemming march and came out to the Bay Area and joined a startup company

that was not related to games but I thought was the right thing to do. So I joined a company called Kibu. Have you guys ever heard of this company? It was a teen girl entertainment startup. It was funded by Kleiner Perkins, Jim Clark, and it was basically going to bring the world of entertainment to teenage girls. What those guys know about teenage girls, I'm not quite sure. But as soon as I arrived, I knew things were probably going to be going out of business. So I actually worked there for about two and a half months and Kibu went out of business, which actually turned into an opportunity for me. At the point, I was sort of at a new city. I didn't know anybody. I thought I was going to have that degree that was going to go in the up and up.

And I found myself in a place where I really sort of understanding what were the things that were driving me. What, at the core, were the things that were going to make me happy? And I came back to games. At that point was when somebody that was kind to me when I was at business school and continues to be a mentor to me is Bing Gordon, who I'm sure a lot of you guys know. So I called up Bing and Bing was like, "Arcadia, I knew you'd call me." And I started talking to him about roles at EA. And interestingly enough, at the time when I started inquiring about Electronic Arts, he was telling me that there was no place for an MBA in the studio portion of the business and I should really be looking at publishing; publishing which holds sort of distribution, marketing, operations, et cetera. And I wanted to do production. I wanted to make games. Traditionally, game makers are the ones that are coming up from QA. They're hard-core gamers in the serious name of the word. They dropped out of school to make games.

They eat, live, breathe games, and those people are at the core of what made games. And so I sort of took a lot of convincing with Bing and what I ended up doing was actually taking an entry-level position with then EA.com leveraging on my Internet experience to get into EA. And so I was making shit money, pretty much, for an MBA and in my first job into EA. I swallowed my pride a little bit but I was in a place I wanted to be. And I remember the first day starting at EA, knowing that I've come home.