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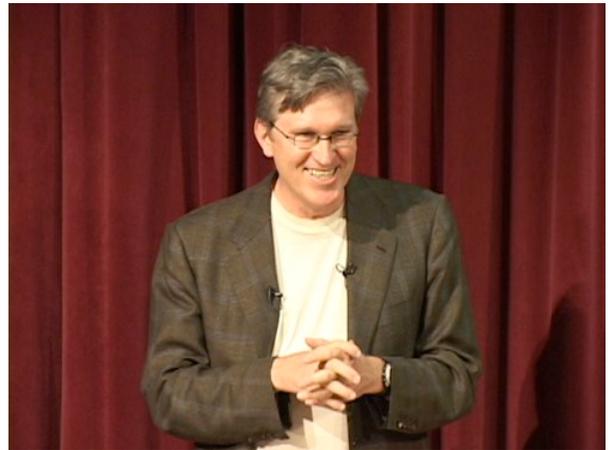
The Importance of Vision

Jeff Raikes, *Microsoft*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/915/The-Importance-of-Vision>

Raikes explains that PowerPoint was created as a new way to present overhead slides. Microsoft made the bet that people would be willing to change the way they present information and launched PowerPoint into one of their most successful applications. You have to listen to your customers, but you also have to see beyond what your customers do now to what they might do in the future, he says.



Transcript

Next principle I want to talk about actually relates to a company right here in Silicon Valley. At that time, this would have been in 1987, there's this company called ForeThought and we were doing word processing and spreadsheet, now it's kind of the obvious things to do in applications but I found this doing a lot of overheads. We got a lot of overhead projectors, it was a common way of communicating. So I thought it would be very cool to have software that did overheads. And so we bought a company called ForeThought and their product? Can you guess? PowerPoint. PowerPoint. It was the PowerPoint product. Now one of the important things I want to emphasize is that we just thought it was cool to have software to do overheads. If you would ask me in 1987, when I five or ten years later, walk into a conference room, plug my computer into a projector and project the presentation, I would have thought well that's a cool idea but it's not very likely to happen. We didn't have that vision.

We didn't see that that was the way the world was going to be but we just thought it was cool to do a software for overheads, it was a part of what people did in information work so we make the bet. And today PowerPoint is one of the most commonly used applications around the world. There is a very important principle here. One is that, when you're involved in something like information work, and I think this is probably true for most businesses. You have to really listen to your customers but even more important you probably have to see beyond what your customers do. Let me give you for what might be a more powerful example. How many of you have ever used Print Preview? Okay. I'm surprised not 100% but pretty close to 100%. You probably won't believe how Print Preview came to existence. In May of 1985 as we were finishing Microsoft Excel on the Macintosh, there was a programmer named Steve Hazelring who was doing the printing code.

Now Steve was a very, very good programmer but he didn't really... laser printers were very expensive and it was way down the hall and he didn't really want to have to go down the hall and get the printout. So what did he do? He wrote a routine that displayed the Spreadsheet on the screen with a little magnifying glass so he can go and check it pixel by pixel. Jay Bloomenthal, the program manager meaning the designer of Microsoft itself came by and said, "Hey, Steve that's really cool. We ought to make that a feature." And that's how Print Preview became a part not only of Microsoft itself but all of our applications. Why did I tell that story? Because no customer ever asked us for Print Preview. It was never a request on the feature list. Yet because Jay was so intimately involved with what people did with spreadsheets, he knew our customers would love that and that's one of the most important principles I would suggest to you about entrepreneurialism. You need to listen to your customers but even better you need to see beyond them. You need to see beyond what they're doing today to imagine what they might do in the future.