



Stanford eCorner

Be a Mensch

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Kawasaki shares some of the qualities that he believes entrepreneurs, and everyone else, should have. In order to be a mensch, a person who is widely respected and trusted, one should help those who cannot be helpful in return, do the right thing in the right way, and pay back to society.



Transcript

And the 11th thing and the bonus is to be a mensch. "Mensch" is Yiddish word to describe person who is very admired, who is trusted, whose word is sought, whose opinion is sought, who is, sort of like a saint, except you do not need to be dead to be a mensch. There is no higher praise for a person than to be a mensch. So let us talk about the elements of menschdom. The first is that a mensch helps people who can not help them. A mensch is not motivated by the fact of, "Wow! This person is the Western Regional Manager for the Wall Street Journal, and if I suck up to this Wall Street Journal person, maybe I will get some good press. This person can help me, therefore I will help them." A mensch does not think like that. A mensch thinks, "I will help people for the sheer pleasure of helping people." You know, a waiter can not really do much for you. I guess they could bring your food, but you know besides that, they can not do very much. You want to see a good test for a mensch, is watch how they treat waiters, and waitresses, and flight attendants.

Because anybody can suck up to someone the CXO level title, but it is how you treat people who can not help you, that determines if you are a mensch. The second point is to do the right thing, the right way. It is not about who can shred their corporate documents faster than Enron. It is about whether you are doing things right, and you are doing the right way. It is about morality. There is a bright, hard, fast line. You know, I think that when you are growing up, there is a very hard, fast, bright line taught to you by your parents. But then as you get more and more into the business world, it tends to become more and more relative. We are not as bad as Enron, right? That's the attitude. That attitude is completely wrong.

A mensch draws a hard, fast line. And the third point of being a mensch is that you desire to pay back society. Entrepreneurs are blessed. They are blessed with vision and energy and the ability to recruit. The ability to create great things. And because of that blessing, you have a moral obligation to pay back society. Ultimately, at the end of one's life, you are judged not by your market share, not whether you beat the U.S. Department of Justice Antitrust Division, not because you had the most German cars, or Italian cars. You are judged by, "Did you make the world a better place?" And so, to truly be the greatest entrepreneur, you would be a mensch. You would do all the right things.

You would help people who can not help you. And you would fundamentally pay back society. You have a moral obligation to pay back society.