



Stanford eCorner

Advice to Aspiring Entrepreneurs

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Williams advises budding entrepreneurs to start small and think big. You should start with something small and something that you care about, he says. Smaller problems can be solved faster and can be eventually scaled into a big company, he adds.



Transcript

Well, I never had any trouble taking risks. That wasn't a particular problem I had. I was always hallucinogenically optimistic about my own abilities. So it's a very tough line to toe. In some cases, well, I should've been more realistic, but then maybe I wouldn't have started or tried a lot of things I tried. And granted a lot of them failed, so maybe I shouldn't have, but they were crucial for the ultimate path. So I would say, definitely try things. But start small. And think big. One thing I realized in looking back, a lot of things I've tried, I didn't have focus essentially.

And you can do lots and lots of things if you do one--I think you and I were talking about this. Doing one at a time is the easiest way to do lots and lots of things. And I still have that problem today, I think. We started out with my current company trying to do too many things, and you just get this idea that you can do all these things. And you kind of forget, especially with the Web and if you're an internet company, there are so many people in the world that solving a very tiny problem can actually turn into a really big company. And if you solve a really small problem, which is obviously much easier and you can do much faster, then you can always build off of that. So that's a big thing that I see time and time again when people are trying to solve too many problems. So I say start with something very small, and start with something that you care about, that you want to exist in the world. And that was the only types of companies or products that I could ever get excited about and really put my heart into and make successful were things that I had a real need for, that I thought I wanted to be a user of the product. And that has its limits.

If you want to have millions of users and you're technically savvy, then you have to kind of temper that. But at least it's something you want to exist in the world as a user, not just, "Oh, there's I think there's a big market here." One thing that happened... Blogger had its ups and downs. One thing happened in late 2000, when lots of the dotcoms were running out of money, was there was a very common scenario where consumer-facing web companies would decide they're enterprise-facing web companies, and we had serious debates about that internally. And everyone thought, 'Well, that's where the money is. There's no money in consumer. And that's how we can save the company.' And I always thought, 'But that's not what you want to create in the world.' So that may or may not be a way to save the company. But even if it was, we're not going to be good at it because we don't really care about it and we don't understand it. So let's stick with the thing we care about and understand. And, fortunately, I was CEO, so I prevailed in that decision.

And it turned out to be...it worked out.