



Stanford eCorner

Work with Smart People

Marissa Mayer, *Google*

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Challenge yourself against better players and you'll become star of the team. Google's Vice President of Location and Local Services, Marissa Mayer, reflects on her personal experience working with some of the finest talent in high-tech, and points out that working with the best empowers each player to excel.



Transcript

The next philosophy came off of a flier I saw here that just really struck me. It was in actually in one of the dotcoms had a flier up in the basement of Gates that said, "You're brilliant, we're hiring." And this slogan works actually really well as a job ad. Like in the early days of Google they had this - when we were trying to hire people, our VP of engineering threw out this opportunity where we could all run an ad, and he had a competition for who could come up with the best hiring ad, and I just ripped off this slogan and put it on the top of the result page, and I think it's really funny, because people - it had the highest click through rate of all the ads we put up there, like a factor of 5. People just see it and they're like, "I'm brilliant, click!" And so it was really sort of like, you know, flattery really does get you everywhere, so... But, you know, the thing that I want to point out here is that it's really wonderful to work in an environment with a lot of smart people. One, because I think it challenges you to think and work on a different level. And the analogy I use for my own life here is that I had a piano teacher when I was in high school, and she had a daughter who was two years older than me, named Laura Beckman, and this interesting thing happened with Laura when she was a junior in high school, which is that she tried out for the volleyball team, and at the end of the trials the coach came to her and said, "You know, Laura, we have a tough case. You're really on the borderline of being varsity, so we're going to give you a choice: you can choose to be on the varsity team, but you're going to bench the entire season, or you can chose to go on the JV team and you can start every game." And most people, when they are faced with that choice, chose to be on the JV team and start, because everyone wants to play more games, and interestingly Laura picked the counterintuitive choice, and she said, "You know what, I want to go and play on the varsity team." I remember everyone kind of scratching their heads at that. But what was interesting is a year later when everyone came back to try out for senior year, Laura made varsity with flying colors and actually ended up being a starter her senior year, and all the people who started on JV their junior year ended up benching on varsity their senior year.

Which I think you guys can all relate that, you know, benching your senior year of high school is a lot worse than benching your junior year. And I remember talking to Laura afterwards. I said, "You know, well, what made you make that choice?" And she just said, "I just knew that if I got to play with the better players, that it would make me better, and that I would ultimately be able to grow and learn a lot." And I think the same thing happens on an intellectual level as well, and I just feel really lucky to be at Google where there's a ton of smart people to learn from, because I think it makes - they challenge you to think and work on a different level than you really thought possible, and the types of perspectives and interesting intellectual arguments they make really give you a whole new way of thinking about things. And it also has a lot of other nice properties, like I referenced earlier, which is that you can give them a lot of empowerment, and you don't have to have a lot of management or bureaucracy

in the organization.