



Stanford eCorner

License to Pursue Dreams

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Passion and momentum build when skilled employees have access to great tools and the time to stretch them in new directions. Marissa Mayer, Vice President of Search Products & User Experience at Google, discusses the groundbreaking company practice of setting aside 20 percent of an employee's time for creative projects. By her own assessment, nearly half of the company's most recent launches came from ideas sparked during this unstructured time.



Transcript

A license to pursue dreams. And this, I think, actually has to do with - probably a lot of you have heard about Google's 20 percent time. How many people here have? This concept that you get to spend one day a week working on whatever you want to work on. And it's interesting, because it almost never plays out like that, right? What we see happen is, you know, it's not like people really religiously say, "Okay, every Friday I'm working on exactly what I want to work on." Sometimes people do that, but more often, you know, they'll work on their core project for a few months, and then they'll take some time off of that and work on their 20 percent project for a few weeks, or they'll work on it on the weekends, or they'll work on it in the evenings, but it's not nearly as principled as 20 percent time. But there's a couple of interesting observations I've seen come out of this. One is that people will say - often ask me, "Well, 20 percent time, doesn't that just mean you're giving away 20 percent of your productivity, because these guys are going to go and work on whatever they want to work on?" And in response to that argument I went and mapped the last six months of 2005, all of the Google product launches and all of our future launches, and tried to determine which ones came from 20 percent time and which ones, you know, came through the normal process. And the answer was 50 percent. So 50 percent of what Google launched in the second half of 2005 actually got built out of 20 percent time. It turns out when you take really smart people, give them really good tools, they build really beautiful, amazing things that are really exciting, and they do it with a lot of passion and momentum, in such a way that, you actually see two and a half times the output of what you would expect given the time. So I think that's a really strong statement.

But when I thought about 20 percent time, the key isn't that it's 20 percent or 1 day a week, it's that I think that our engineers and our product developers see that and they realize that this is a company that really trusts them, that really wants them to be creative, and really wants them to explore whatever it is that they want to explore, and it's that license to do whatever they want that really ultimately fuels a huge amount of creativity and a huge amount of innovation.