



Stanford eCorner

Facing the Unexpected with Adaptability

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1693/Facing-the-Unexpected-with-Adaptability>

Waldorf believes that in an entrepreneurial career, nothing plays out as expected. Being flexible and willing to adapt to new things is the key to success.



Transcript

The third point of thinking entrepreneurially and having a great career is really being willing to adapt. All of you have something special and that is that you were able to get admitted to Stanford University as either an undergraduate or a graduate student. And I don't say that as a way of kind of just pumping you all up. It shows that you were able to look at a pretty well-known set of things you had to get done to get admitted. Everybody knew what it would take to get admitted to Stanford, but all of you were willing to work hard enough and work smart enough, as other people weren't, to get admitted. But it was a known set of things that you had to get done. You knew what courses you had to take. You knew what recommendations you needed, extra-curricular, all those kinds of things. An entrepreneurial career is entirely different. Almost nothing will play out as you had expected.

Nothing. And if it does, it will probably be just by luck. So you've got to be willing to adapt. You've got to be willing to stay flexible as things come your way, again, whether you're at a small company or a mid-sized company. From eHarmony's early days I'll tell you a story. When we originally launched the business, we were under the impression that we would be able to have this compatibility matching system with absolutely no photos. It would just give people a match. And, well, we went out and we launched and we went to market. And not surprisingly, men in particular weren't super excited about using a service that didn't have any photos. Think about that.

We actually had this belief--it seems crazy in retrospect--that we could launch an online relationship service without photos. It might be like going on the Facebook and taking down all the photos. Probably wouldn't work as well. This prompted an enormous amount of soul-searching for us, because we really thought it was our core value to just do this deep compatibility matching, and if we showed photos would that somehow undermine what we were all about. We talked about it for a long time internally. And in the end we decided there was absolutely no reason we couldn't show photos because they were all compatible matches somebody was receiving. And after we did that, it was I think one of the key drivers of our later growth. But in retrospect, while it seemed easy at the time, I think it was one of the greatest demonstrations of adaptability we had as a business. And I think this happens all the time in an entrepreneurial career in terms of, you'll go to a company thinking it's going to be incredibly successful, and maybe that one wasn't, or the ones that you thought you were taking a flyer turned out to be huge. But it also happens once you're in a job.

You will have a lot of unanticipated things happen and you're going to have to balance between sort of your core views and your core beliefs and what it takes to be successful. In this case for us, we felt that they were completely compatible for us

because every match we were showing was a compatible match. Just as a side note, if you have a photo posted on eHarmony, you are eight times more likely to get a response to any communication. So I think it showed that users really demanded it, and I think we made the right decision.