



Stanford eCorner

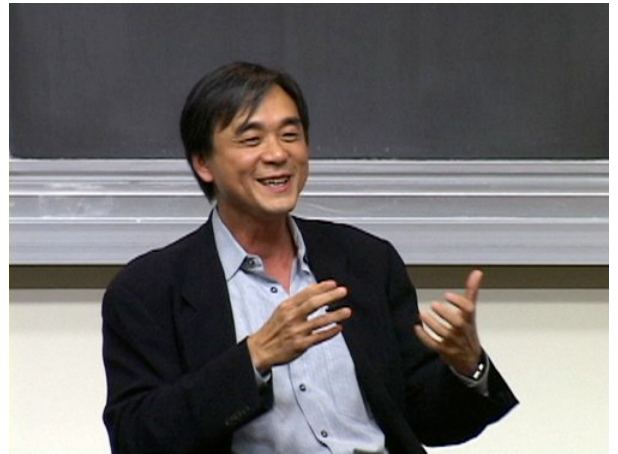
Working With and Making Decisions with Great People

Dominic Orr, *Aruba Networks*

October 17, 2007

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/1868/Working-With-and-Making-Decisions-with-Great-People>

Dominic Orr, CEO of Aruba Networks, begins by describing two surprises he encountered when working with great people: first, how difficult it is for experienced people to change and second, how challenging it is to be intellectually honest. Orr then describes his efforts to overcome these impediments by cultivating a fast-decision making process focused on the facts and intellectual honesty. However, to achieve this environment each individual has to have a thick-skin and a commitment to self-evaluation, qualities that usually must be cultivated over time.



Transcript

I would say that one surprising thing is that people really -- when they are very powerful and very experienced, it's amazing how hard it is to change, in terms of the reactions and behavior. That is one thing that I learned over time. The other thing has to do with my management style. If you want to go for speed, and thoughtful speed, then you have to trade off between a lot of discussion and analysis versus going with the gut. So in order to do that, what I have is a phrase that summarizes the methodology, we call brutal intellectual honesty. What it is: there's too many decisions to make, there's too little time. And in order to not just use your guts, sometimes your gut's wrong, then you have very precious time to retract. What you want is to get all the facts and opinions and wisdom out on the table, have a really honest debate about it, given a limited period of time. And then at the end of that period of time, you say, "Okay, I have enough opinions and facts, let's make a decision and go." In that process, you need people to be very thick-skinned. Because I feel that if you look into a lot of situations, people get bogged down into very emotional arguments or political situations and so on, when they have projected out a theory or a certain way of doing things, a certain architecture and so on.

And they put the passion, which is good, and the ego, which is dangerous. And then you see people locking it, and they get themselves into a position that they cannot back off. And then they have to find all kinds of ways either to face, lobby the other people to support them and so on, or save face. That is incredibly time wasting. And if you recall, this time is the only competitive resource that we have in our hands. We cannot allow that to happen. So what I encourage is people to be thick-skinned about it and put everything out, and don't defend it with your ego, and let intellectual honesty dictate. And that's what it is. And the brutal part is the tricky part. A lot of people apply it to the other guy.

What I really meant when I created the term is to apply it to yourself, that when you really put forward a very passionate argument, when you actually get convinced intellectually, there's a better way to do it. Be brutal to yourself, and say, "Okay. Yeah. You're right. You know, I put my best foot forward, and next, right--I've got to do it your way." So in that process, I found out that there's an immense amount of counseling that is needed, because fundamentally, for people to be thick-skinned, they have to be very confident. And somehow, people carry packages in their lives, and so on. And not everybody is as confident with themselves as you think they are. And so a lot of the work is really to get them to be comfortable with themselves enough with the peers to achieve what I need to do, which is the brutal intellectual honesty methodology. So a lot of the trend I saw is around that area. And that's probably tied to my emphasis on thoughtful speed.