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The Mission-Driven Start-Up

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November 06, 2008

Video URL: http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2092/The-Mission-Driven-Start-Up

While taking time away from her day job on bed rest, Cuil Co-founder Anna Patterson eventually found herself volunteering for a non-profit and programming the largest search engine to date. Looking back, she recalls that the experience taught her critical management skills that have carried over into the start-up: the need to motivate unpaid workers, and the ability to bring passion and mission into the workplace.

Transcript

I went to a non-profit as a volunteer because I actually needed to be a stay-at-home mom for a while. I was having a difficult pregnancy with the second of the four kids and my doctor said I needed to be on bed rest and I said, well, can I program? So it's very similar to being very stationary for anyone who does program here. So as some people do, I got into the project and I really couldn't let go, so I kept programming up a search engine at recall.archive.org. And when I launched it, it was 12 billion pages and it was by far the biggest search engine in the world when I launched it. Yahoo was at 2, and Google was at 3, and Recall had that interesting property of indexing pages over time because the Internet archive is a non-profit that tries to archive all the Internet content that's gone on and they take crawls as donations so their primary donation source is from Alexa and now Cuil is donating to the archive as well. So everything we crawl, you know, will get saved for posterity at the Internet archive. So that's why the 12 billion search engine was bigger than the number of pages that were on the Web at that time, because it took snapshots of the Web. The non-profits also taught amazing things about management because you're trying to organize people who aren't getting paid. So what you have to do is after all you inspire the employees, and that's really important in the startup as well because at a startup, you're often underpaying with respect to the broad market so you really need to have a team that really believes in your vision and at the Internet archive or any non-profit that you get involved in and volunteer. That's one of the founding organizing principles around it, is that the people they believed and the vision.

Another lesson that the industry has taught you over and over again is that small team has made a big difference but you can really - when you sit at any non-profit you know they're giving books out to people who never had books before and they're doing all these very worthy causes, and so it's worth showing up.