



## Stanford eCorner

### Make It Personal and Make It Work

Sheryl Sandberg, *Facebook*

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Connecting community and making information accessible are the two overarching threads that run through some of the most successful companies of the last century, points out Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg. Here, she cites her own personal career path that began in the non-profit sector and evolved into technology, and numerous examples of companies with purpose, drive, and scalable vision, including Google, Apple, Nike, and Starbucks. She speaks of these as case studies to drive home her point on effective leadership containing a vision that will scale over time, place, and product line.



#### Transcript

So in my career, this was always really important to me. I always really wanted to work on things that mattered. I started off thinking I would never ever work in a company - like ever. Probably wrote it, told lots of people; all those embarrassing things you do when you're younger and you're sure. Then you get older next generation, last generation transition. And you realize you never really knew and that you probably don't know now. But for me, I was sure I never wanted to work in a company because I wanted to make a difference and I wanted to make someone else's life better if I was going to go work all day. And so I started my career working on leprosy in India for the World Bank. And there's nothing like working on something like that to really make you think about what you're doing with your time, the fortune of your birth, and what you have to give back. And then later on, I worked at the U.S.

Treasury Department during the Clinton years, during the Asian financial crisis. And while it wasn't the financial crisis of today that's hitting us, it was one that was hitting a lot of people and impoverishing hundreds of millions of people in some of the poorest countries of the world. So it felt very mission-based. And then I completely surprised myself by when I was leaving the government. So, if you're in the government and you're a political appointee in the United States they elect a new president. So they elect George Bush, you know George W and then they kick you out. So you have to find a new job. And I found myself really drawn to technology because when you are sitting at the Treasury looking at what was happening in the economy - and I was there from 1996 to 2000, beginning of 2001 - so you can see that amazing time that was. This is when technology really took off on the consumer's side and on the Internet side. And it just seems like the companies working out here were making a huge difference, even though they weren't non-profits.

So I decided I was wrong and I would come work, work in this and try to get a job in technology. And I went to Google. And my reason for going to Google - Google was a tiny little company about 250 or so people, people I worked with told me I was crazy, because this was a after the bubble burst. "You're going to a web-based, ad supported tech company? Are you insane? Pets.com is over." This is for those of you who even remember that. "This is not a good idea." But Google had a really compelling mission and a really compelling vision of achieving that mission. And the mission was to take the world's information and make it universally useful and accessible. To take information that only the elite would have access to and make it accessible. And interestingly enough there's no probably no better example of that than this lecture in this class. Because this is an audience of the elite. These are Stanford students and the neighboring community.

And apparently, these broadcasts - probably not mine, but certainly Steve Ballmer's - there are about 5 million people who download these things. So this is information that myself and other guest speakers are giving that would only have been available to the elite that is now available widely, and that was very much the mission of Google. And why I think its important is to note that it scales. No matter what Google was trying to do, it was about making information accessible. And so that's the kind of thing that motivates people to go above and beyond; that makes Larry, Sergey, and Eric and all the people around them great leaders, and does it because that vision is compelling. And you don't feel like it's a vision you can finish in the first day, no one's ever going to organize the entire world's information. So it's a vision that scales and that is so important to leadership. And then I left and went to Facebook. And I went to Facebook for a very specific reason and once again it was very mission-based. Facebook is trying to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.

And what does that mean? Mark Zuckerberg, our founder, who I think was one of the guests in this lecture a couple of years ago, has a very compelling vision of what needs to change in the world and what was changing. And his vision is that we used to think that we got information on the web that was very anonymous. You interact with most websites in a very anonymous way. And so sure, the web made a lot of information available. But the information you care most about is actually about you and your friends. It's what you're doing, your life, and the web at the time he found the Facebook wasn't sharing that information and that's vision and a mission. And the vision of how to get there is really, really important. And so for both of these companies, they had visions that scaled. And those visions are usually stated in mission statements, they can be or they cannot be. But it doesn't only have to be technology companies or certainly not only companies I've worked with.

Apple, it is a technology company, but the vision Apple had that Steve Job's had so many years ago - before many of you were way too young too remember - was taking computing and taking it from something that was accessible by businesses and use by businesses and making it personal. And that seems completely obvious now because you all have personal computers and it doesn't even occur to you that you wouldn't. But at the time that was not obvious. It was not obvious that computing power would be something individual's had. Or, think about Starbucks. I just joined the board so it's something I'm familiar with. Starbucks had a pretty compelling mission early on, which was basically, and they would never say it this way, but a lot of the coffee the United States drank at the time was really bad, and there wasn't really this third place. So Howard Schultz came in and bought this tiny, little five stores of Starbucks and had a really, really compelling vision about something like coffee, right? A pretty basic thing that was part of people's lives. But he was going to make it better and he was going to create community along with it. He was going to take, inspire, and nurture the human spirit one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.

Or think about Nike. Nike really took the concept of who is an athlete and brought that home. Before Nike if you thought about great athletics you were thinking about Tiger Woods or whoever was that Tiger Woods of that generation. Sorry sports is not my best thing. Someone would give me this speech for my next quote. But Nike said if you have a body you're an athlete, if you can buy a pair of shoes you can just do it and came up with that swish and it was inspiring. I think about that when I run and I'm not a very good runner. But when I see those ads, I run a little faster that day. And I think that's true of a lot of people. That they said, "You can be an athlete, too." And the interesting thing about all of these visions is that they scaled.

They were visions that these companies set out at the beginning that continue to work. And maybe Apple's has been brought in not just personal computing but now personal electronics but it's the same vision, "Make it personal and make it work." And so if you want to be an entrepreneur and you want to be a leader or you want to be an entrepreneur or a leader or some combination, a vision that scales, that's compelling is such an integral part of great leadership. And I believe that you can be the most compelling human being ever, but you have to compel people with the why, and the what you are doing is the why. Help us build a community. Help us connect the world. Help us make information accessible, that's compelling.