



Stanford eCorner

Building Hi-Tech Skyscrapers

Mark Pincus, Zynga

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Mark Pincus, CEO of Zynga, equates building a sustainable online empire with building the skyscrapers that shaped the look of modern cities at the turn of the last century. Pincus reflects upon his 15-20 year career in hi-tech - riddled with many companies who asked him to leave - where he was set ineffective entrepreneurial goals. He discusses the change in his perspective; from garnering ROI, to offering sustainability, to building immortal "Internet treasures" - that is, the type of online utility that forever changes the world. He discusses the importance of thinking from the mountain top, and that the rest of the "distractions" - i.e. IPO's, acquisition, becoming a market leader, etc. - are just fool's gold.



Transcript

Mark Pincus: Bing introduced this idea to me that he had talked about Doerr. I didn't even know that. He talked about this Internet treasure and he talked about this concept that it could be, the thing that our generation is remembered for. That there was the people who built the skyscrapers in the early 1900s and what if in a hundred years what our generation is remembered for, the greatest thing that we gave to the world were these digital skyscrapers, like Facebook and Google and Facebook and eBay and Amazon. And I immediately realized that that's what my career was about and he just put something into words that I had struggled for 15 or 20 years around because I couldn't articulate it. And what was so amazing for me is, I was like, "Oh, it was so obvious. That's what I've been trying to do all this time," is because my career since I've been on this like talk show circuit the last couple days, like a lot of these quotes of things I've said have gotten out. But I said, "I've been kicked out of all these big companies I worked at because I was either too entrepreneurial or a smartass or I didn't believe in paying dues or whatever things make you not kicked out." Bing Gordon: You just never found a boss who fully appreciated you. Mark Pincus: Yeah. But I had pursued the wrong goals.

So, one lesson that I hope to leave you guys with if you want to go be entrepreneurs is set your real goals early because I didn't do that. And by the way I tried to, but I just didn't have perspective. So, I thought my goal when I started my first company was to have a great return for my investors, and I did. And then I thought my goal with my second company was a sustainable business. And we did. And it wasn't until I started Tribe that I realize; started getting on my real life path which he said years later was to create an Internet treasure. And what I realized that I had not achieved and what I wanted so badly was really immortality. I mean, I think that what we all want on some level, I mean especially if you have a big ego or if you've had a great historical view of yourself or you want to, or you're full of it. But you hope that you can leave something, have world impact, right? Like we want to do something that changes the world and I start realizing my only shot of it was through this new media Internet career. That was going to be it.

I wasn't going to be the world's greatest at anything else. And so, it was not until I started Tribe that I started pursuing that

and what a waste. I mean that I just wasted so many years of my career. I learned but I hadn't had the right goals. And so, I meet Bing and he introduced this concept to me and I thought, "OK, an Internet treasure is some kind of consumer service that we can't remember life without." We can't remember life before Google or life before BlackBerry, right? And, oh my god, that's what I want to do and the rest is just a means to an end. It's bullshit. So, there's no reason to sell your company. There's no reason to go public. There's no reason for any of this stuff. If you have that perspective on what you want to do, then the rest is fool's gold.

It's just things that are going to pull you off your path. It's just distractions. So, Bing gave me that and that was one thing we put up here we wanted to make sure we talked about.