



Stanford eCorner

Entrepreneurs Have No Rules

John Adler, *Accuray*; Trip Adler, *Scribd*

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Acuray founder John Adler laughs and says his free-spirited son, Trip Adler, couldn't have done anything aside from becoming an entrepreneur. "Entrepreneurs have no rules," he points out. One piece of advice he does give his son: Never give up the title of CEO. It's one of the hardest things to learn, he confesses. Trip Adler, CEO of Scribd, concurs. He explains that in many cases, it is the founder who is able to provide the vision to effectively direct product development.



Transcript

So John, your son calls you and says, "OK. I'm going to go dive in. I'm going to do this." Were you enthusiastic and when he decide to do it, what kind of guidance did you give him? Was it something you said, "Yes. Go for it. This is great." I was completely enthusiastic. I think we're both products of Silicon Valley, both products of Stanford. And I think no place in the world quite understands what entrepreneurs are missing like we do around here. And to be honest, I was a little worried. I don't know what else he could do. He's a free spirit.

And he's very capable and he has an independent mind. And the nice thing about entrepreneurs, there's no rules. You make up the rules. And so, I was incredibly enthusiastic. And my advice to him was always, even to this day, a very simple advice and I said, "Don't give up the CEO position." I said, "You create this business and if I have learned a lesson over the years was just the power vested in the CEO and the opportunity to control the business, influence the business." And so, I kind of expected from the early onset that all the wise heads on Sand Hill Road to write the big checks, they always want some gray hair or some with no hair to kind of be making the decisions. But there's nothing like the passion and the energy and the understanding that a young entrepreneur CEO brings to the table. So, I said, "Don't give it up." And I think that's one lesson that hopefully he's still taking to heart, I hope. Yeah. So Trip, is that useful advice? Yeah. I think so.

There's a lot of young founders I think that, I've already seen in my short three-year career, give up the CEO position and I think have it not work out too well. When you're building a company in the early days, it's really all about, this is when it is early but also when the company is huge. It's about just, it's a technology company engineering and product and usually the types of CEO that get hired are usually not really specials in that, they're specials in everything but that. So, it just doesn't really make sense to have somebody who doesn't understand that right in the company. And the worst cases of that person, has the wrong opinion about you. If the guy just sort of steps other the way and lets the founder or the person who knows how to do that, do that, that's great. But if the CEO takes the project in the wrong direction, then that usually destroys the company.