



Stanford eCorner

Constraints Are Your Friends

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David Heinemeier Hansson reminds the audience of a simple fact: you'll never outdo Microsoft or Google; they will always have more resources than start-ups. But an entrepreneur must realize that constraints are your friend. Having some limitations will force you to think differently than your competition.



Transcript

The fact is, when you restrict yourself, when you put up constraints for yourself, when you say, "I'm only going to work 40 hours a week on this." That's going to be the hard limit. I'm going to work 30 hours a week or as I had when we're building Basecamp, "I'm going to work 10 hours a week." You have no choice but to underdo your competition. You are not going to out-effort Microsoft or Google. You're not going to be able to put in more programming hours than they are. Thus, you don't go head-to-head with them because there's no need. It just doesn't work. It doesn't work to go head-to-head with somebody who has a million X more than you do. You are going to lose. So, the sooner you realize this, the sooner you realize this, you realize that the constraints are your friend because the constraints force you to do way less and different than your competition. You can't just build a me-too product on 10 hours a week.

That's not going to work. We were not going to build a better Word. That was just not going to work. We would have to pick a new category, a new type of product, something that combines something else, something that was vastly different. Different enough that we could do it in the time that we have and it would be simpler than everything else. Well, here's the wonderful thing. Consumers generally love that. The number one feedback we have, whenever we do customer service and we've been doing this for five years is that "We love how simple your product is. We love how easy it is to get started. We love the fact that it doesn't have a 300 page manual, that we have to wade through.

We love the fact that there are no training classes. We love all the things that come from doing less. We love all the things that comes from underdoing your competition, having fewer features than your competition." So, that's a good thing.