



Stanford eCorner

Pros and Cons of Being a Young Entrepreneur

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What are the biggest obstacles and assets for young entrepreneurs? Unwrapped, inc. founder Josh Reeves answers that the biggest obstacle is not knowing how to manage all the priorities. Clara Shih, founder of Hearsay Labs, believes that being a young entrepreneur has its advantages because you can highlight your ability to solve problems from a fresh perspective. Steve Garrity, of Hearsay Labs, says that youth allows you to ask lots of seemingly naive questions. Plus, Increo Solutions, Inc. founder Kimber Lockhart adds that starting a business is challenging for everyone, not just young entrepreneurs. Don't assume that older, first time entrepreneurs have all the answers.



Transcript

So, one really clear response that comes to mind, I think it all goes down to what you learn on campus versus what you learn while working. So, I had worked at a company for three years after graduating and before starting the new company. So, the answer to me would be focus. How you prioritize, how you're going to spend your time to go achieve the business opportunity you've identified. And I think as someone that's younger, I'm leveraging mostly my experience at Zazzle in making that decision, mentors I've talked to, advisers that I've talked to. But I can also very clearly see how more experience that I have, let's say ten years in the future, I'll have so much more of a wealth in knowledge to do that prioritization, to have that focus because that's the biggest challenge that I identified with my startup. We have so many ideas, so many things to do. It's constant and it's fun, a daily challenge to figure out. Given these many hours, what are we going to go do to have the most impact with our time, because we have limited resources. And I just want to get better at that.

I know I'm going to get better at it. And I see people that are older than me that are really good in it. And that's what I would say. I would flip the question and say, I think there's tremendous advantages to being younger. Both in terms of where we are in our lives and how much time we can spend in a company all the way to the way that we think. I think we think out of the box because we haven't been indoctrinated for that long, not for some of these guys at all. And I think that can be really powerful when you're an entrepreneur because you are creating something that no one else has ever thought of before. And you're able to do that because you haven't studied as much or you haven't been told that this is the way that things are. I was going to do exactly the same thing and flip it. One word that I'm going to add to Clara's list, which has turned out to be an interesting negotiating strategy.

It lets you open a lot of questions that you couldn't otherwise, which is, "Hey, this is my first time. Can you explain these terms to me?" That sounds wrong, like, "Why do you need that?" And it becomes a very easy way to have conversations. It's

only reasonable. You're not giving anything away. They know you're young. They know you're a first-time entrepreneur. And you can say, "Hey, I just think we should rethink this from fresh principles." And it often leads to a very interesting different discussion. I think obviously Josh's point is totally the truth, that you're missing a lot of the experience. There's value in that. We've been lucky enough to find some really great advisers that have added a lot of that.

A few months into Inereo, when I was learning accounting and insurance and all of these other fun things that you need to know in order to run a company that as a Computer Science major at Stanford, albeit one that took a lot of business classes, you don't know. It was right in there that I heard and I can't remember who exactly told me this, but somebody said, "You know, there's a lot of skills that you don't necessarily have that are necessary in becoming an entrepreneur. But do you think that those people that are older than you, that are quitting the job that they have to become an entrepreneur have done all of those different things necessary to start a company in any of their roles in the past?" No. Nobody except entrepreneurs do the full set of things required to start a company. Nobody has that full skill set. So, yes, you may be learning things you don't know. You may be forced to pull out Quickbooks and figure out how to do month-by-month subscription-based accounting in two hours. But I can bet you that anybody else who is getting into that industry or that field for the first time is going to have similar challenges.