



Stanford eCorner

What Have I Learned as a CEO

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February 17, 2010

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2399/What-Have-I-Learned-as-a-CEO>

"The list of what I don't know is much larger than what I do know," surmises SlideShare CEO Rashmi Sinha. But the only thing she does know, she continues, is how to learn, figure out the situation she is facing and get better at handling it. Pressed deeper by the moderator, she emphasizes how important it is to ask questions and have good advisers. Good advisers "are able to spot the signals and see the patterns," she says, adding that a good adviser sees what stage your company is in just by hearing about the issues you're seeing. "It gets down to the whole Silicon Valley magic again," summarizes Jonathan Boutelle, cofounder of SlideShare - this is a community full of experienced entrepreneurs from whom you can ask for advice.



Transcript

I knew how to build a product. I didn't necessarily know how to run a company, the entire thing and watch it grow. And for every day it's a learning experience. I mean, I would say the list of what I don't know is much larger than what I do know. But the only thing I really know is how to learn, how to figure out what the situation in front of me is and try to get better at it. I can see there are VCs in the audience. I didn't know how to run, do the board meetings and stuff. There were a lot of things I didn't know. So, this is a typical example of founding CEO, entrepreneurs, technical team. Is there a book? How did you do this? Is it friends or network? How does an entrepreneur anywhere learn how to run a company? I would say everyone around you; the advisers, people on your board, you just ask a lot of questions.

And I think what they are able to give you, which I find very valuable, is that they're able to spot the signals and see the pattern. So, people who are good, they're able to tell you what stage you're at and these are the issues you are seeing and this is one way to deal with them. I think it also gets down to the whole Silicon Valley magic again, which is even as sort of semi-outsiders, you can connect networks of people that have been through the stuff that you're about to go through. So, right after we launched, I was freaking out about operations. How do you keep a cluster of servers up? We never had to do that before. And I was able to find eight or ten people who had been through exactly what we were doing. They walked me through what tools they used, what worked, what didn't work, what problems you don't have to solve. One of the key nuggets was that in that early launch phase, when traffic is growing like crazy, you don't even really need any alerting because you or somebody from the company is on the site at all times looking at it. So, if something goes down, you'll know it because you'll be experiencing it. You're so passionate about it.