



Stanford eCorner

Defining the Voice of a Start-up

Marc Andreessen, *Serial Entrepreneur*

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The best entrepreneurs know how to talk about and sell their company, and the way they define their enterprise can often be a polarizing sport. Essentially, propelling a young company - either to investors or to talent - is a sales job, and one that a company founder must find compelling. Marc Andreessen, serial entrepreneur, speaks at length about the necessity of a founder to define their company and to establish early on what it is, and what it is not.



Transcript

But when you're a three-person startup with no revenue, just an exciting vision, how do you convince your top choices once you've identified them to actually join your venture instead of going to Microsoft or Google? Stock options, which they'll you those aren't worth anything. And then a friend of mine likes to say that a part of it is vision. And he says the difference between a vision and a hallucination is that other people can see the vision. And I think that's actually the core answer to the question. So the best entrepreneurs are really good at selling people on their company precisely because they can explain the way the world is going to look in a way that is so compelling. This is the famous Steve Jobs. If you talk about Steve Jobs, he has what we call the reality distortion field. So if you get within ten feet of Steve Jobs, whatever he says in the next 20 minutes you're going to walk out of there believing, whatever he says. He can say the sky is purple and you'll be like, "Yep, that makes total sense." Four hours later over dinner as you're explaining it to your wife or your husband, you look, "Well, I don't really know what he meant by that. But it was really, really compelling at the time." The best entrepreneurs all tend to have that in common.

They tend to be really good at that. It's essentially sales, selling to employees. And so it's an incredibly valuable skill to be able to do that - plus stock options. The other thing I've found with hiring over the years is that while it's incredibly frustrating, part of the frustration is actually a good thing because the frustration is you try and to talk somebody into joining they don't come. And you're like, "Damn it, I wasted a lot of time." But hiring is also a selection process. And it's a self-selection process on the part of the candidate. Of all the people you interview, if you hire them all it would turn out that a good two-thirds or three-quarters of them you probably shouldn't have hired anyway. And what you can do in the hiring process, what the best companies do, is they provide a very stark idea of what their company is and what it isn't. So we are a company where people are expected to work 18-hour days. And if you don't like that, don't come here.

Or we are a company where people expect to go home at 5:00 every day, and if you think that would be frustrating don't do it. Whatever it is. Or we have dogs in the office. We have a company we've invested in where the whole company does yoga together. And so if you like yoga, this is the company for you. If you don't like yoga, don't go there. You're going to be asked to put your feet in positions that you're just going to be completely uncomfortable with. Literally, yoga every day. The company is called Asana, which of course means a yoga pose, I learned. So a very very very stark idea.

It's very good because it's polarizing. And I think the best companies tend to be polarizing. And so if in your hiring process you're turning people off as often as you're turning them on because they are deciding, "Well this is clearly not the right fit for me," I think that's a good thing.