



Stanford eCorner

Honing in on Results

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In the field of innovation, decide what you want the end result to be before you invent it, advises ExploraMed CEO Josh Makower. In addition, he advises a disciplined approach toward innovation that focuses on living inside of a problem to understand it to exhaustion. The end result, he asserts, is that entrepreneurs can focus more directly on producing results of value, rather than simply falling in love with a single idea.



Transcript

And in just its basic form, this is the process. And I think the most interesting thing about this process that people don't really think about is that it starts with deciding what you want it to be before you've invented it. And that's a different concept for some people. They think, "Well, I got to think of an idea of what it should be." But actually if you think about what it needs to be before you invent it, then you'll know when you found it. And starting with that strategic structure, it has got to be a business of a certain size. It has got to address a certain population. It has got to have intellectual property protection. It has got to be able to be achievable within a certain time frame. Whatever your parameters are, it's going to be different for an individual versus a big company versus a small company. So those are all different.

But when you figure out what that is for you, it really sets a framework that you can act on. The next fundamental step is another one that seems relatively obvious but it's amazing how few people do it, which is to focus on the need. And when we say focus on the need, I see some of my fellows here in the room. They know what that means. It sounds so simple to do, of course. You're going to look at a need and then you're going to solve it. But there is a discipline to that because as human beings we desire to not be in an uncertain place. We want to have certainty. We want to know what the answer is. We want to run to the answer.

In fact as soon as we think of the first idea that we can think of, which usually happens as soon as we start getting exposed to problems, we come up with an idea. And then that's the only thing that's filling our mind, is the solution. But what happens then is you fall in love with that solution. You can't get it out of your mind. You can't change. You can't think of anything else. So the discipline is actually to not invent but to actually focus on the problem and to spend the appropriate amount of time really digesting that problem, living in that problem, understanding the parameters. Where are the needs of this problem? What's the specification that needs to be met to solve this problem the best? And when you've developed that discipline, you're able to release yourself from this desire to get to certainty quickly. And you can live in that place where you can really see the problem for what it is. And that's what we've done in every one of the companies that we've started.

We've been in that place. And as a result we've created something that other people have never thought of before. And so that is where the whole process value is. The rest of it is all straightforward. Once you really have that problem specked out, brainstorming is easy. I mean in fact, you came up with so many ideas you couldn't believe it. But here's what we got going into, we've got a great specification of what it needs to be once it's invented. And that helps us very quickly figure out which was the best idea. And we are able to divorce ourselves from just loving one idea and move on to the one that's right.