



Stanford eCorner

Learning Curves Never End

Wendy Kopp, *Teach for America*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2600/Learning-Curves-Never-End>

CEO and Founder Wendy Kopp discusses Teach For America's challenge to face major organizational learning curves, in its early years. Kopp describes how this process continues, as the organization works to better answer questions around issues of recruitment, training, professional development, management, and financing.



Transcript

I view it I mean really that was the beginning of the real Teach For America story. That was the beginning of a man's learning curves on every front. Most importantly, is those 500 people started teaching and basically hit the wall in their schools and realized how challenging this was going to be. And we realized that we had our work cut out for us to be successful in this and went through then a man's learning curves and probably will never finish the learning curve. I mean there's always so much more to be done but around understanding how do we recruit and select and train and develop teachers who are not just surviving in classrooms with their kids but actually excelling, truly putting their kids on a different trajectory and learning the lessons that come from that living their experience not more disillusioned about the possibility of change but more committed about the possibility of change. So we've gone through 20 years and will keep going through more years of intense learning curves around that question. There were also many organizational learning curves. You know, around how to actually sustain the skill that we started out let alone grow and just to name a couple of them, I mean, I started out in this thinking that management, all the things that we would put in that bucket of things was not worth my time or energy. And it turned out that whether or not we would fulfill our mission and potential to be a force for change would have everything to do with whether or not we just embrace all the hard core lessons of how do you build a high performing organization. And there were huge learning curves financially as well.

You know, I said we started out with \$2.5 million of funds and our second year we raised \$5 million and our third year, we raised \$7.5 million and then all of our first funders sort of dropping off in 500 thousand and million dollar chunks for various reasons. And we'd learned it a very, very hard way that we were going to have to figure out a revenue strategy that would enable us to even keep this afloat let alone enable us to seriously grow.