# Stanford eCorner

## Trust Your Gut and Collect Experience

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Instagram Co-Founder Mike Krieger encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to avoid following trends. He explains founders deal with uncertainty everyday, so you should pursue ideas that you truly believe in. Krieger also believes it's important to collect experience, including the completion of side projects on nights and weekends. Fellow Co-Founder Kevin Systrom also warns against becoming caught up in entrepreneurship as a lifestyle choice.

### Transcript

So the first one, when you're just starting out and you're dealing with the bucket of uncertainty that is being an entrepreneur and getting started, you want to latch on to things that you've seen before. We really quickly learned that you just cannot really learn to be an entrepreneur from a book, a blog or a talk, and it turns out that a day on the job was worth a year of experience and what happens is the collection of experiences and knowledge you can get from those sources are super important. And I'm not dismissing them entirely as something that you should just ignore, but that first day when you're starting to make those decisions where the data isn't really there and there hasn't been a blog post posted to Hacker News that was like, 'Deciding what to do on the first day of startup' or 'Making this really tough decision', it turns out a lot of it is very specific to your situation and all you can really learn to do beforehand is try to deal with that uncertainty. So making snap decisions or quick decisions in the face of a lot of uncertainty. We'll hit up on situations early on where we weren't sure if we were going to take Instagram a follow model, for example like Twitter, or more friendship like Facebook. And there is just no blog, book or talk that we could've ever really seen beforehand that would have taught us to do either of those things, since that was about sitting down and saying, 'Well, what do we know beforehand? What does our gut tell us?' And trusting your gut, I think, is a theme of this talk. And so developing a better gut is the work you can invest in beforehand, and then saying, 'All right, let's invest in this. Let's stay the course for a while and really see it through,' rather than wavering for months at a time being, 'Oh, why don't we build both? Then we'll switch off,' maybe make it a preference like 'worst mistake ever,' give up on making that decision and instead make it a preference, and so and so forth where you're having these micro decisions that in the end sum up to what becomes your product basically. And we really rapidly found that, as tempting as it is to go search off for prior accounts of something similar, that's not decision is what makes a difference. But what you can be doing is doing quick projects, side projects during school, even when you're outside when you're doing a job.

And most of what we learned and applied into our startup were things that we were doing on the weekends which, depending on the companies, either something encouraged or discouraged. But usually if you're excited enough about something you will find the time to work in it. The other thing is, once you do start a startup, it's super tempting to get caught up in the meta part of doing a startup, so going to entrepreneurship events and being, 'Yes, I want to talk about being an entrepreneur.' We were incubated at Dogpatch Labs, which was a great experience. We were surrounded by 30 startups, a rotating cast. We were there for probably longer than anybody else. Too long. Too long. We saw three or four different classes of startups go through that. And the successful ones were the ones that were in it 9 am and left at 10 or 11 pm and were just putting in the work, and not the ones that showed up at 10, hung around, left at 6, who in my opinion were doing a startup as a lifestyle choice because they didn't want a boss. That's not really a good enough reason to do a startup.

It should be that you wake up and you're obsessed with this idea and you want to make it happen, and you're not there to

hang around in this club or have this fun chat with people. And that distinction wasn't that apparent to me Day 1 because everybody's doing a startup, this should be a thing. And then one month in people were like, "You guys work really hard." We kept hearing that comment at Dogpatch, and we were. We were working the hours that we felt we wanted to throw into the startup. And I guess it's a gut check if you're finding yourself getting drawn into the meta part of the startup of being an entrepreneur, of being really excited about... Somebody said to us earlier, the phrase was like, "You can't call yourself an entrepreneur. Somebody has to call you an entrepreneur in a way." And it's true. It's very tempting to get caught up in that. And I would encourage you to step back a little bit and find out the only thing that ships products and the only thing ultimately end users care about is the product you deliver to them, not how will they talk about you in TechCrunch or exactly who your investors were or which events you attended.