



# Stanford eCorner

## Shaped by Formative Experiences

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2934/Shaped-by-Formative-Experiences>

Entrepreneur Jeff Church describes some of the formative, early-life experiences that would go on to encourage later interest in becoming an entrepreneur and social enterprise advocate.



### Transcript

I want to start with taking you back to my senior year in high school a long time ago. And I was playing in a football game. It was the seventh game of my senior year. We had lost every single game of my junior year. We lost the first six games in my senior year. And I was a very mediocre football player on a really lousy team. And it was late in the game, in this particular game I actually had a pretty good game. I caught a touchdown pass and I'd caught a couple of other passes, so I was having a pretty good game and we were actually within kind of striking distance of potentially winning the game. And as we were on the opponent's 10-yard line and as the quarterback rolled out, I was in the end zone and I happened to be open, but the quarterback didn't see me. And I had to split-second decide, so I raised my hand and let the quarterback know that I was open or should I - and thereby take the chance that he throws me the ball and I drop the ball and become the goat or should I not raise my hand and let the quarterback have his chances, if he gets in the end zone.

And my decision it felt like an eternity in that split-second of my calculus. And I ended up making a decision that's kind of haunted me, but then formatively changed me for years. I made the decision not to raise my hand. And the quarterback didn't see me, he ended up getting tackled and we ended up losing. And I struggled with that so much afterwards because what really was the reality of what it was, I was more afraid of failing than I was afraid of being mediocre at that time in my life. I didn't have enough confidence in myself to really step out there and appreciate what I really could do. It was only later that I had learned that I had more fear about being mediocre than I did about failing which is ultimately what pushed me over the entrepreneurial cliff, if you will. The second one that I want to mention is failing at my - getting my lifeguard certificate when I was 16. And I thought I studied, I thought I did the practical exams; I thought I did all that, but I failed miserably on both. I failed on the practical exam and I failed on the test.

And for years, again, I agonized over how can I fail a lifeguarding test? How could I do something to fail something like that? But when I realized what it did for me it was one of those formative moments that it taught me the rest of my life that I better out-prepare everything. So today, I'm not necessarily the sharpest guy intellectually in the room, but I will outwork anyone in the room. And I learned that kind of a secret to a successful 40-hour work week is to work 80 and that's just how I can - that's just how I can do it. I also learned the value of networking. I got a pretty good job out of graduate school because I went to a pretty good graduate school. I went to a pretty good graduate school because I had a pretty good job before that. I got a pretty good job before that because I got a pretty good internship. I got a pretty good internship because I was involved in the accounting society at my school and I hosted different firms to come into town to meet with the students. And as they were coming in to meet with the students, I realized that, hey, I can network with this people and I can maybe do something good for myself. And I did that and it kind of helped.

And the value of networking is just so important, particularly at a younger age.