



Stanford eCorner

Maintaining a Stay Hungry Culture

Jocelyn Goldfein, *Facebook*

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Facebook Director of Engineering Jocelyn Goldfein describes how the physical space, an attitude of risk-taking, and a sense of humility contribute to Facebook's "stay hungry" internal culture.



Transcript

So let's drill down, you said the culture of Facebook was amazing and you walked in and you felt so comfortable. Can you paint a picture of the culture of Facebook? I mean, imagine, we are all visiting, what would we experience? Yes. You would experience unfinished ceilings, concrete floors, desks everywhere, no offices, not even Mark has an office and writing all over the walls and posters. And you'd see company slogans like "this journey is 1% finished" or "move fast and break things" or "fail harder". And Facebook was born out of disruption and was born out of trying things and seeing what happened and it not working out, and trying again and trying harder and never being daunted by failure. Doesn't mean we set out to failure, it just means like we're not afraid of it and we are willing to keep taking risks. And the entire environment is meant to keep you from feeling complacent or comfortable or like we have won, we never want to feel like we've won, we always want to feel pretty hungry and like somebody could come eat our lunch tomorrow because somebody could. And we never want to take it for granted. We want - and so for - it's the most humble, successful company I have ever known and it may sound strange to say that Facebook is a humble company, but it really is. We really don't take success for granted and we think that our users are choosing to be there and they could just easily choose not to be there if we don't deliver a great service.

I love the fact that first thing you said when I ask you to describe the culture was describe the space. Yes. Now, it's something we spend a lot of time thinking about in the classes I teach on creativity and certainly we're in this really remarkable space here at Stanford. How important is the space to the culture there and I know I've spent time at Facebook and it's really interesting especially with the new buildings. What sort of things did people think about in creating this space? Oh, it's very deliberate. It's absolutely deliberate. Culture, you cannot just think of the culture you want and then create it. You have - culture arises from so many small things. Someone actually, a Stanford professor, gosh, I wish could remember his name, but from the business school one said something that really stuck with me which is culture is the behaviors that you reward and punish. At the end of the day, people look around and they mimic the behaviors that they think will be successful and they try to avoid the behaviors they think will be unsuccessful.

I think that's really true actually and deeply true. But you've also got to try to show people what behaviors you want and what behaviors you don't want. And the space is one of those things that just sort of sneaks right past all your sort of human defenses and cynicism and processing and it just goes straight to the hindbrain and tells you and you understand it on a gut level, like when you walk on those concrete floors, you know, oh, we're not finished, we're not luxurious, we're not taking it for granted, like we're scrappy. And the open space is another huge one, you guys are all, I think many of you are probably Computer Science majors; hopefully, you've all taken 106, if not take 106 before you leave Stanford. This is the best opportunity of a lifetime. And you know if you've programmed that like you need focused attention, right? You need flow time, you need - and you know that even small interruptions like it takes you a long time to get back into the stream of things. And so the idea of having programmers sit out in open space, at open desks, with desks all around them and talking in conversation in

foot traffic, that's controversial. For many years it was the gold standard in Silicon Valley was to have offices. Engineers were housed in offices, preferably a single office, sometimes two people per office, it's what VMware did. And when we took over the campus from Sony, it was all offices we told the builders to actually start by knocking down every wall that wasn't structural and make as big and empty space in the building as we could and then we sort of fill it from there.

And why - why was it so important to us that we would actually sacrifice engineer productivity, which is what we're doing to have everybody out in the open space like that. It's not density, it is not to save money. Well, it's because one of the key values of Facebook is be open. It's what the product is for, the product is for sharing a communication and that's also really fundamental to our DNA as a culture too. It's actually that we expect every individual to be informed and in the know about what's going on and that empowers you to make good decisions and so we sort of set the expectation that everything is out in the open, everybody is plugged in, everybody is aware of what's going on. And then we put headphones in the vending machines and try to create lots of private spaces where people can hide and give everybody a laptop and have a pretty loose work from home policy. So we do everything we can to mitigate the productivity impact of that openness, but ultimately every time we have to choose, we choose openness.