



Stanford eCorner

Irreverence Pays Benefits

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October 02, 2013

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3181/Irreverence-Pays-Benefits>

An overt desire to be associated with successful people has led to an unintentional culture of reverence in Silicon Valley, according to entrepreneur Matthew Rabinowitz. To counteract the effects of this issue, Rabinowitz encourages entrepreneurs to be a bit irreverent to free yourself from ego and to make better decisions.



Transcript

We are surrounded by so many bright people at Stanford and in Silicon Valley there are so many successful people, some of them by luck, some of them by hard work and achievement. But there is this sub culture that's emerged of reverence. Especially at the business school, no normative judgments implied, people want to be associated with these folks who have done so well and you want to have them respect you. And you want to be up in a pedestal like they are. And I'm not saying be disrespectful. Obviously you don't have to be disrespectful, the people around here I think really do command respect. But you want to be a little bit irreverent, because it's going to help you make better decisions, it's going to give you that sort of freedom from your own ego, be a little bit irreverent towards yourself, people are going to respect you more and life is just going to be a lot happier. When I came to Stanford as an undergrad, I had won the National Science Olympiad, in South Africa, which is this competition that all the science students take and it was kind of a big deal and I was good, but I wasn't that good. And I was really lucky. And I arrived at Stanford, studying electrical engineering and physics.

I don't know where my parents were, I don't know where my academic advisor was. If my academic advisor is watching this I don't know where you were, and I had to be on a pedestal. I competed with everyone and I worked all the time. And luckily I had a couple of friends who took me out from time to time I don't know what they saw in me at that stage. But I to this day have never had anyone outside of Stanford University, look at my transcript. I have never had a job interview. And after all of this work and all of this competing, it added so little to my quality of life. All it did is make me want to be something for other people and how they would see me. And you should really spend your time trying to work out the things that you want to do for the sake of doing them because they make you feel good not because you want to appear anything for anyone because it's very hard to find your way back after you tried so long to be on a pedestal.