



Stanford eCorner

You Should be Up at Night

Mike Olson, *Cloudera*

November 13, 2013

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3230/You-Should-be-Up-at-Night>

"If you are regularly sleeping through the night as the founder of a tech company, you're doing it wrong," says Mike Olson, co-founder and chief strategy officer of Cloudera. Olson believes the big, hard questions around product, customer satisfaction and engineering capacity should always be on a tech founder's mind.



Transcript

If you're regularly sleeping through the night as a founder of a tech company, you're doing it wrong. Seriously, there is always something that should be scaring the crap out of you, always, always, always. In those very first days what we knew was we wanted to be a product company, we hadn't yet figured out what the product was going to be. We had engaged with a handful of very valuable clients and we were struggling to try to abstract their requirements and figure out what our unique product strategy could be and in the experience of servicing those guys and delivering software that was valuable to them, we ran into real operational issues, they were running meaningful jobs on the platform, we had to service, we had to support them and we had to innovate on the product and figuring out how to balance that activity to have enough engineering capacity to make them successful, but then also to make our product successful. That was a huge stressor in those early days. That was the single biggest challenge, what will our product be? Honestly, I will tell you there is no question in our minds now of the scale of the opportunity. We'll never stop being strategic in thinking about our product and where it needs to go. But over the course of the next two years, frankly our challenge is going to be living up to the competitive set that we've attracted to the market. I mean, I'm out there punching it out for deals with big enterprise vendors, who for two decades have been selling \$70 million annual deals to C level executives of the Fortune 1000. They visit each other at Christmas time in their homes, right, the salespeople and the execs and somehow we have to inject ourselves into those relationships as a bold little 500-person company based in Palo Alto and be credible.

And growing up that way requires discipline, requires excellence, requires new ways of behavior that we are learning, that we are adopting as we go. And look I'm bullish. I believe we are going to do it, but man I'm sweating that one, I'm sweating that one.