



Stanford eCorner

Tell the Story Better Than Anybody Else

Tristan Walker, *Walker and Company*

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Tristan Walker, founder and CEO of Walker and Company Brands, talks about ensuring that authenticity exists at his startup, and how that vision gets passed along to new recruits. It starts with having a meaningful personal connection to the product, and making sure the values of new employees are compatible with those of the company.



Transcript

So, the question was, I talked about how important authenticity was at Foursquare, how important it is at Walker & Company and then what are some kind of practical things I am doing to ensure that authenticity. So, I think number one, I built my company around that mission, right, and what I mean by that is, it really started with my own personal story, right? So our first brand that we're launching is actually a shaving brand and it's the first end-to-end shaving system to fix issues related to like shaving irritation, razor bumps and that sort of thing for men of color, right, and I was able to get there because I realized for 15 years of my life I wasn't able to shave because all the mass marketed products out there were just not for me, right, which allowed me to kind of do the research and figure out alright, what's the story behind that, right. It's a function of my having curly hair and I can kind of go but that's for another session. Not only that, I didn't have a father to teach me how to shave the right way, right? When I worked on Wall Street I remember this experience of walking on the trading floor, having hair on my face, having a guy stand up and saying Tristan, get that stuff off your face, in front of everybody, right, and being mortified not by the fact that that guy was a jerk but because I knew I had to get that stuff off my face, right, and use all the crappy tools that were out there to do it and know that I had to spend the next two months of my like life trying to fix what was going to happen to me. Anyway I say those stories because now when people ask me why I am like starting a brand with first focus on shavings because I can tell that story better than anybody, right? And when I think about Foursquare, what was interesting is, we were like starting a whole new market of sorts. This whole - well location based services or whatever wasn't really brand new but our take on it was pretty fresh and new and were building things that just made our lives better, right, so our ability to articulate what the product needed to be, right, our ability to tell our users and talk to our users about why we've made those decisions, it was just entrenched in the company, right? We were a bunch of kind of guys and girls who just wanted to have fun in cities and explore our cities a little bit better, right? So what I learned is if you can't tell that story yourself with your own personal story, it's probably not worth doing because you'll probably get bored of it after a couple of years, right? So again at Walker & Company, the shaving thing started my story with my story and because we're building a company that is focused on a very diverse group of people that means I have to hire a diverse group of people and maybe the next brand that we launch isn't my story, it's one of my employee's stories, right? So I try to set up the organization in a way where that won't not be an issue. And so when you hire people, how do you pass your vision across of Walker & Co. in a very clear, specific manner and how do you - as you scale and add more people and it's less easy for you to talk to them personally, how do you ensure that the vision gets passed on across the company? Oh, that's a great question. So how do I ensure at least as the company kind of grows and scales that the vision is kind of passed on for kind of new employees, that's right? So it also starts with like values we have for the organization, right, so we say, here are things that we all agree are important, right? We got to be inspired by our employees, we got to have respect for each other, we got to have the courage to do daring things, right, we got to practice good judgment, like wellness is an important thing and loyalty, right? Now, a lot of people always talk about like all these values at their companies and they feel fluffy and all that stuff, right? But you really have to like entrench it into the culture of the organization, that's how we recruit, right? So when we actually recruit a candidate, we will kind of base our

judgment on that candidate based on those values, right? Every single new employee that comes in, they're going to have to learn those values, like that's just like one of the very many types of ways that we do it but you have to put it in the processes of how the organization operates.