



Stanford eCorner

When the Mission is the Bottom Line

Sal Khan, *Khan Academy*

April 16, 2014

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3320/When-the-Mission-is-the-Bottom-Line>

Khan Academy Founder and Executive Director Sal Khan discusses how his organization's nonprofit status and mission differentiates Khan Academy from other ventures in Silicon Valley. Whereas many entrepreneurs are focused on customer growth, a lucrative exit and launching the next venture, Khan says the challenge for Khan Academy is staying true to its mission.



Transcript

So the question was going forward what will be our biggest challenge? And so as an Executive Director of a not for profit, I will say we're always fundraising. So that's our - but I think our biggest challenge is I think it's staying true to our mission. Its not getting distracted, not - I'd say we have found ourselves, we're not for profit, we're obviously kind of in a different - we're playing a different game than everyone in Silicon Valley, but at the same time, it's tempting because we're in this place that has certain value systems, some of them positive, some of them can sometimes not be positive. Where you do say oh, they have that many unique users and we have this many unique users and they - we grew 50% this year, they grew 51% this year, but we have to emulate what they're doing otherwise we're going to fall behind in all that. And it's human nature to kind of find - it's healthy actually to have that competitiveness, I mean, that's sometimes missing from some non-profits. But I think what we've keep reminding ourselves is we're not for profit for a reason that we want to kind of play the long game that we don't want to just grow fast, have some type of exit or some type of acquisition and then who cares what happened, I'm done and I will go do what I need to do. That we want to be around in 100 years or 200 years and we want to be at a place where 5 or 10, Silicon Valley has a - when it's five people, it's really kind of Wild West, you started getting some people, as soon as you have some traction in the marketplace, you start attracting kind of talent from - and you start getting kind of your best talent right around that phase, then kind of you go into the IPO, right as you're approaching the IPO you start to get a few people who start thinking a little more in terms of dollar signs, then the IPO happens and then people are looking for the next adventure and then you see a lot, I mean this story is told over and over again in Silicon Valley, 10 or 15 years in the future, it's not the place that the hotshot Stanford grad wants to work anymore. It's - they want to do the new company that was where this company was 15 or 20 years ago and we don't want to be that. We want to make sure that we're always attracting the best people that we're always a organization that's innovating, that's always focused on our bottom line, which is our mission. And so, yes I think we have growth that we can be proud of for us.

If we had to pick two different realities, one reality where a billion people are using us, but they're using us at a - it's a nice place to look up stuff and answer their questions, that's one reality and another reality is 10 million people are using us. We don't grow at all, but there it's a substantive experience and we are changing their life and we're like - we are actually helping to educate them and we can measure it. We would rather do the second of the two experiences, because then at least in our mind that's a more substantive place to be.